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**Women's Contemporary Yoga Lifestyles:  
An Embodied Ethnography of Becomings**

A thesis  
submitted in fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree  
of  
**Doctor of Philosophy**  
at  
**The University of Waikato**  
by

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THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**WAIKATO**  
*Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato*

2020

## **Abstract**

Within this thesis, I offer insight into the lifestyles of contemporary women Yoga practitioners. Delving into complex and nuanced experiences of women embodying Yoga lifestyles offers multiple opportunities to extend upon current understandings. In examining the various ways that the women of this study are navigating an increasingly popular movement culture that has foundations in ancient texts from India, I illustrate how today's Yoga lifestyles are a cumulative expression of ancient and contemporary knowledges.

Moving alongside women practitioners throughout an embodied ethnographic study, I gained deep insights into the philosophies and practices of the women. Informed by the experiences of 19 women living in the Waikato region of Aotearoa/New Zealand through in-depth and informal interviews, observations, journals and focus groups, I offer rich, embodied knowledge from the women alongside my own creative writing. Engaging in feminist methods and in dialogue with yogic principles, I build an entangled ethnographic approach inspired by both the embodied philosophies of Yoga practitioners and contemporary feminist theory. Working at this intersection, I develop a mutually enriching research experience where multiple ways of knowing and a complex engagement with both theory and method can resonate.

Findings are presented in three empirical chapters that demonstrate nuanced and complex understandings of women's Yoga lifestyles. The first addresses the concept of lifestyle as understood by contemporary women Yoga practitioners. Drawing upon feminist lifestyles research, this chapter follows these women's journeys as they claim and maintain Yoga lifestyles. The second chapter moves into a dialogue with feminist new materialisms, and in particular, Karen Barad's (2007) concept of entanglement. I conceptualise an entangled Yoga body as always intra-acting and continually becoming. Using the women's experiences, Barad's concept, and evocative writing, I provide three examples (breath, Yoga mats and the heart) to represent an entangled Yoga body. The third and final empirical chapter weaves together recent work from Rosi Braidotti (2019) with insights from the women to contemplate the components of Yoga lifestyles as expressed by the women's daily choices. This chapter suggests the women find meaning

for their contemporary Yoga lifestyles through everyday ethically-informed acts contributing to an affirmative becoming.

Moving, teaching and embodying Yoga philosophy as a researcher and experienced member of the Yoga community, I consider the complexity of the women's lived experiences and my place amongst them. Inquiring deeply into questions around embodiment, materiality, and posthumanism, I develop an ethico-onto-epistemological stance that extends upon previous Yoga lifestyle research and contributes to the growing body of literature on women's lived experiences in moving bodies.



## Acknowledgements

Thank you to the people of Aotearoa/New Zealand. As a foreigner, I am grateful for the warm welcome and the opportunity to further my studies. It has been an honour to live on this land and to learn amongst the people living here. I wish to thank the University of Waikato and in particular, I extend much gratitude to Te Mata Kairangi School of Graduate Research for providing me with the University of Waikato Doctoral Scholarship. It is this support that enabled me to complete an international PhD.

Thank you to my dear friends who have nourished me over the course of this intensive process. In giving me moments of laughter and adventure, kindness and care, you have all contributed to the successful completion of this research. In particular, I wish to thank my friends Kasha and Omar for filling me with love and having me over for countless meals and merriment. Thanks for being my Aotearoa family. Thank you KTD for our numerous heart-felt conversations and your unwavering belief in the value of this research. Thank you also to Stephy and Andy for hosting me during my Vancouver conference and ‘setting me up for success.’ Thank you TZ for supporting my wild adventures, this PhD journey and being my lifelong confidant. Thank you to Wardy, Twisty, Crawford, Silvia, Stavvy, Momo, Hillz, Rubes and G, Nadine and the countless others that fill me up with your unwavering support and kindness. I can not tell you how much it means to share the journey of life with such deep, loving friends. Thank you.

I wish to extend much gratitude to the women practitioners who were involved in this study. You entered into this project with hope and excitement, welcomed me into your lives with sincerity and trust, and delved courageously into all topics alongside me. I am forever grateful for the deep connections we made, your faith in my abilities, and the continual support and encouragement you provided. This PhD would not exist without your contribution. The breadth of wisdom that you shared with me enabled this research to reach depths I could not have anticipated. Thank you.

I wish to extend immeasurable gratitude to my supervisors: Associate Professor Karen Barbour and Professor Holly Thorpe. Words fall short when thinking of everything that you both have done for me. Thank you Karen for taking care of me. Even though I have been far away from home, I have felt safe knowing that you are near. You have gone

above and beyond what I ever thought possible for a supervisor. Being in your presence, witnessing how you move and interact in this world inspires me to dream of a space in academia that is both soft and strong, kind and honest. Thank you Holly for believing in me and inspiring me. The day we first met for a coffee in Wāingarua/Raglan to discuss a potential PhD was the moment I was convinced. You inspired me from the start and I remain amazed by all that you do and all that you are. Your work ethic, brilliance, kindness and humility are attributes I aspire to. Karen and Holly, you both provide me with endless inspiration as women living exceptional lives with grace. Your faith in my ability and patience with my process has enabled me to soar to new heights that I could not have imagined for myself. Thank you.

Lastly (and most importantly), I extend much love and appreciation to my family: Dale, Bill, Katie, Steffan, Annika, Niall and Johnny. You fill me with happiness even from afar. Dale and Bill, your unwavering belief in me, throughout my unpredictable range of life choices, has shown me a love that is unparalleled. Your unconditional love and support has enabled me to reach heights that I could not have achieved on my own. There are no words that can contain my gratitude for you both. I feel very blessed to have you as parents. Katie and Steffan, thank you for always being there for me. The ‘circle of love’ sustains me through the trials and tribulations of life. Extra special thank you to my sister, Katie, you give me strength. Your thoughtful letters and packages warmed my heart and kept me going. Thank you for being my mock examiner, for finding all my spelling mistakes and for filling my life with so much love and fun. You are the best. Love you seestah. Annika and Niall, I love you more than words can say. My life has more meaning now that I am your ‘Tita.’ Johnny, thank you for being curious about my research and giving me an example of how to stay calm and compassionate while diving into life. Thank you for sending me your beautiful recordings and giving me moments of serenity. Watching the sunset while listening to your music provided me with immeasurable calm at times when I needed it most. I love you all so very much. Thank you for everything.

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# **Chapter One: Introduction**

## **What is a contemporary Yoga lifestyle?**

Yoga<sup>1</sup> is an ancient lifestyle system with roots in India that have their origin around 5000 years ago (De Michelis, 2004). Tracing back thousands of years, it becomes difficult to establish a precise timeline for original teachings, but what is known of the Yoga tradition today is that it is both lengthy and multi-layered (Feuerstein & Wilber, 1998). As a practice that has survived over thousands of years, Yoga has been adapted and adopted amongst various populations intrigued by teachings that claim to bring practitioners towards states of enlightenment (White, 2012).

Today, the number of Yoga lifestyle practitioners is exponentially increasing, the range of styles is becoming more numerous and endless recommendations for living alongside the teachings of Yoga are arising out of both contemporary and ancient sources (Ivtzan & Jegatheeswaran, 2015). As a practitioner with over 20 years of experience, I recognise the challenges some individuals face when navigating the range of information around what constitutes a contemporary Yoga lifestyle. Within the pages of this thesis, I articulate my process of designing research, moving alongside practitioners and analysing findings from a 14-month ethnography with women embodying contemporary Yoga lifestyles.

As a woman with a long history in various practices of Yoga, I recognise that the majority of practitioners today identify as women (Park, Braun & Siegel, 2015). Beginning this research as an intimate insider amongst the Yoga community, I know that the majority of publications on Yoga lifestyles are written by men. Therefore, recognising the lack of (and potential for) research on women's Yoga lifestyles as wider systems of philosophical and ethical choices, I situate this work within a feminist and embodied ethnography. Through this embodied and feminist ethnography, I take the opportunity to articulate findings on the breadth of Yoga lifestyle systems being lived

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<sup>1</sup> In this thesis I choose to capitalise the 'Y' in Yoga. This punctuation acknowledges the cultural lifestyle system of Yoga as a philosophical and ethical practice that has spiritual roots in India (Devi, 2010; Salmon, Lush, Jablonski & Sephton, 2009).

by contemporary women who have dedicated themselves to the teachings of Yoga for many years.

For this research, I analyse Yoga lifestyle practices of 19 local women based in the Waikato region of Aotearoa/New Zealand.<sup>2</sup> Moving with the women of this study, I built a methodological approach that incorporated the knowledges of Yoga and feminisms. This research process enabled me to build close relationships with participants through multiple opportunities for deep sharing over a long period of time. Multiple methods of observation, interviews, journaling, movement and focus groups enabled me to gather a wide range of information around the daily lives of women dedicated to Yoga. Within this study, I consider how many moments from the ‘transcendent’ to the ‘mundane’ present the potential to broaden understandings of contemporary Yoga lifestyles.

Over the pages that follow, I describe my journey bringing women’s embodied Yoga lifestyle experiences into a dialogue with feminist theory in a research setting. My cumulative and continual attempts at articulating complex, embodied experiences in Yoga using feminist ethnographic methods fill the contents of these pages. In this research, I find myself learning through women’s lived experiences in Yoga and searching for ways to articulate embodied understandings. I grapple with philosophical tensions that arise through my engagement with both theory and method as my deepening understandings of the women’s lived experiences awakens the potential to think about Yoga (and research) differently. Reading feminist theory and learning from the women, I find opportunities for the worlds of Yoga and feminisms to resonate. Over the course of this study, I locate instances where these two worlds can intertwine.

The contents of this introduction chapter include a rationale around topic choice, research questions and reflections on working with women while adopting a feminist ethnographic approach. Additionally, I present key concepts used in this thesis and describe how I am engaging with them throughout this work. These concepts include lifestyle, embodiment and ethics. Situating this work amongst a long history of both feminist and yogic knowledges, this study suggests how an embodied, entangled,

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<sup>2</sup> Aotearoa is the Te Reo Māori (Māori language) name for New Zealand. Throughout this thesis, I use both Te Reo Māori and English place names for locations in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

feminist ethnographic study on contemporary Yoga lifestyles offers insight into ways of being for a growing population of women.

## **My interest in Yoga lifestyles**

The vignette below is based on an average morning in my contemporary Yoga lifestyle. It illustrates a range of influences that I navigate while moving inside a world that is influenced by social, cultural, environmental, physical and emotional factors:

✱

*5:30 A.M.*

✱

*Waking up early is never easy for me.*

*No matter how many blogs I scan for inspirational morning routines,*

*I just don't think I'm meant to be up at this time of day...*

*and yet...my alarm is sounding...*

*I'm trying to be a 'good' yogi so I roll over and begin my 'morning routine' which (lately) consists of pressing snooze one too many times, realising I've overslept, then running around my room grabbing essentials and rushing out the door:*

*Coffee...Tights...Mat...Keys...Phone...*

*With essentials assembled, I take a quick look in the mirror.*

*Oooof... the remnants of late night study are glaringly present in my reflection.*

*Alas, I have no time for 'self-care' regimes. I'm already late...*

✱

*Driving to the studio I am still half asleep.*

*It's a typical winter morning in the Waikato.*

*A thick fog is hanging over the empty, early morning streets.*

*Soft orange.*

*Glimmering street lights are shining through the haze*

*The weather provides a magical backdrop to my commute.*

*A sense of beauty and calm arises in my otherwise hectic morning.*

✱

*I arrive to the studio...and I'm late...*

*This morning it is a self-directed class so I am not in jeopardy of interrupting a teacher,*

*but am cognisant that others have already begun their practice...*

*I enter the main room with care. Gently opening the large slider door, I am met with a dimly lit, warm room and a few bodies moving quietly.*

*I roll out my mat and position myself for practice.*

✱

*I take a moment and allow myself to absorb the sights and sounds of the world rising to meet the day. Birds chirping...a delivery truck rumbling down the alley...a pink sky...*

✱

*Closing my eyes, I press my palms together in front of my chest and bring my full attention to my breath. I tune into the rhythmic consistency of my breathing and welcome my full awareness to my sensory experience.*

*I gently open my eyes and begin to move.*

*Positions are imprinted as patterns of movement that my body recognises.*

*We move together into shapes and tune into the subtle sensations that are supporting each passing moment. I work with my body and my environment while trying not to allow my mind to dictate what is possible on this morning.*

✱

*After almost an hour and a half I am rewarded with savasana.<sup>3</sup>*

*I lie down and feel the weight of my body supported by the floor beneath me.*

*I am sinking into the earth and can feel my body softening.*

✱

*I am hovering in a timeless space...*

✱

*Screeeeeeeeee...*

*The studio door rolls open as someone leaves practice and with the sounds that accompany this motion, my mind is also on the move. I would love to lie in this space for another ten minutes, but expectations and deadlines are already invading my thoughts. I begrudgingly begin to wiggle my fingers and toes to initiate the process of welcoming my attention back to my body.*

✱

*As I leave the studio I recognise that I am unnecessarily rushing.*

*I try to bring a bit more presence into my movements.*

*Taking considered steps, I notice how my feet are pressing into the cushion of my boots.*

---

<sup>3</sup> A Yoga āsana pose (also called corpse pose) that consists of lying comfortably on the floor.

*Looking up into nearby trees, the leaves dancing in the wind...*  
*My Yoga practice continues as I maintain my attention for just one moment longer*  
*before throwing my mat in the back of the car and racing to the office.*

\*

Although I am a Yoga practitioner and teacher with over 20 years of experience, I still wrestle with the tensions I face whilst adopting Yoga teachings throughout my daily life. Intimately understanding my personal struggles navigating this range of information, I became curious about other women's experiences. This curiosity prompted me to consider how I might gather in-depth insights into the individualised Yoga lifestyles of contemporary women practitioners.

Engaging in Yoga for many years, I have experienced a range of styles in very diverse communities. This has involved living on Yoga farms in both Guatemala and Canada, participating in 30-day hot Yoga challenges, riding my bike to urban donation-based studios in central London, practicing with online resources, attending trainings with well-known Yoga gurus, observing silence during extensive meditation trainings, and dancing to techno while running large corporate Yoga events. As a practitioner, I have experienced a range of Yoga in contemporary communities. As a researcher, I recognise that the nuances of living with Yoga are not adequately represented in current publications.

The summer of 2011 was the first time that I lived amongst a community attempting to follow the teachings of an ancient Yoga lifestyle system. Living in a remote setting, I remember some of my initial experiences immersing myself in the broader ethical and philosophical teachings of Yoga. The range of practices that this community was engaging with (as interpreted from ancient Yoga texts) included lengthy cleansing techniques involving various orifices, early morning *āsana* (bodily positions)<sup>4</sup>, *prāṇāyāma* (breathing exercises) and meditation practices that extended over many hours. The community also encouraged observing sacred silences that included no verbal and/or physical communication, participating in community gatherings for *kirtan* (devotional singing), and eating primarily food grown on the land and prepared using Ayurveda principles. Living on this Yoga farm also involved dancing barefoot in the

---

<sup>4</sup> In this thesis, *Sanskrit* words are transliterated and italicized. Their first mention is often accompanied by a brief description in brackets (provided it is short). Subsequent uses will not include a definition (see Appendix 1 for a Glossary of terminology).

grass, naked sauna sessions, seminars on compassionate communication and continued self-inquiry in a safe environment.

After this initial experience, I spent many summers living on Yoga farms. I began teaching Yoga and mindfulness internationally, and became increasingly intrigued by the inclusion of particular Yoga *āsana* and meditation practices in corporate and educational settings. This resulted in me obtaining my teacher training certification and designing, delivering and researching the influence of an online mindfulness program for my Masters in Psychology (Ivtzan, Young, Martman, Jeffrey, Lomas, Hart & Eiroa-Orosa, 2016). Through my embodied experiences in a Yoga lifestyle, I understood both Yoga *āsana* and mindfulness practices to be non-dualistic teachings that can facilitate an understanding of the mind and body as intricately connected aspects that are simultaneously contributing to lived experiences (Kabat-Zinn, 2011; Vertinsky, 2015).

Interestingly, I began to recognise that although I was embodying practices in ways that helped me to understand my intricately connected lived experience, the way that I was engaging in these teachings (through both academic research and in Yoga studios) was perpetuating a Cartesian mind-body split. As a Yoga *āsana* teacher, I was leading students through sequences catering (predominantly) for mobility in the body. For my Masters in Psychology, I was delivering mindfulness programming aimed at training the mind and then writing papers on my findings. In both spaces, I was offering tools that could assist individuals with navigating stressors in life, and yet neither encapsulated the range of Yoga teachings available to practitioners interested in incorporating this vast lifestyle system throughout their daily life.

Experiencing two different approaches to Yoga, I understood that although I had benefitted from a comprehensive immersion living the principles of Yoga as a lifestyle system, current teachings in contemporary settings were being delivered and analysed in discrete parts. As such, I began this research with a desire to study a more broadly defined Yoga lifestyle in an attempt at gathering insights around the entire system of Yoga as it is being embodied by contemporary women practitioners. I wanted to learn from women about the choices they were making and how they were adopting and adapting the extensive lifestyle teachings available to them. Gaining insight into the various ways that this system is being lived today, my aim is to broaden understandings

around women's experiences in Yoga lifestyles.

Today, Yoga lifestyle practices are evolving within a changing world. As new populations adopt practices throughout their daily lives, they are experimenting with a range of ancient and contemporary teachings. In this thesis, I am intrigued by the ways that women Yoga practitioners are living personally meaningful lifestyles. I am not interested in discovering one 'ultimate' or 'correct' method for living a Yoga lifestyle. Instead, I aim to reveal the nuanced lives of contemporary women practitioners and the multiple ways they are bringing the vast range of teachings to life. In addition, I am intrigued by innovation in qualitative research and am inspired by the possibility of adopting creative approaches to inquiry that can result in expansive understandings of lived experiences.

## **Research questions**

Beginning this research with a background in psychology, I intended to run a Yoga lifestyle intervention. I wanted to incorporate my knowledge of mindfulness programming, build upon my quantitative analysis skills, and learn about qualitative methods. However, this thesis does not feature an intervention study, nor does it use a quantitative approach. The primary and secondary research questions below reflect my interest in gathering information around the nuanced, lived experiences for long-term practitioners embodying the practices of Yoga. Letting go of a mixed methods intervention, opting for an embodied and feminist ethnographic approach, then becoming inspired by the theory of posthumanism and new materialisms, highlights the large philosophical shift I experienced throughout this journey of inquiry. Both the design of this research and my theoretical stance as the researcher have expanded in response to my deepening awareness of the complexities present when living alongside Yoga in contemporary times.

### ***Primary research question***

#### *1. What is a contemporary Yoga lifestyle?*

My primary research question remained the same from inception through to development of this research. However, the way that I chose to gain insight into the

lives of contemporary practitioners changed. Starting this project with an embodied understanding of Yoga, I wanted to build an academic study that could facilitate a nuanced understanding of women's lived experiences in Yoga. I also wanted to extend upon Yoga lifestyle research and took a considered amount of time developing a methodological structure that could facilitate depth and breadth.

Reading academic literature claiming the term 'Yoga lifestyle' reveals a proclivity towards intervention programming, small focus groups and quantitative diagnostics (this is expanded in Chapter Two) (Khalsa & Cope, 2006; Yadav, Magan, Mehta, Sharma & Mahapatra, 2012). Further, popular publications that recommend 'the' Yoga lifestyle through pseudo-guidebooks are based on translations of ancient texts as interpreted by predominantly male authors (Desikachar, 1995; Iyengar, 1966). The lack of representation for women's voices in popular publications, as well as the limited scope of practitioners and practices in research claiming the term Yoga lifestyle, inspired me to consider how I might extend understandings through research that more specifically examines the concept of a lifestyle. The question, what is a contemporary Yoga lifestyle? Indicates a desire to reconceptualise what is meant by the word 'lifestyle' in a yogic context.

### ***Secondary research questions***

- 2. How are experienced women practitioners adopting, adapting, and/or navigating teachings from both ancient and contemporary sources in their everyday Yoga lifestyles?*
- 3. What possibilities are contained within feminist ethnographic approaches for facilitating a deeper understanding of women's lived experiences in Yoga lifestyles?*

Secondary questions allowed for a process of continual inquiry that considered the influence of multiple sources of knowledge contributing to a cumulative understanding of lived experience. Throughout this research, lived experiences are prioritised and considered to be in perpetual motion responding and shifting as new knowledge presents the potential to experience life differently. In moving alongside the women, I gained insight into the combination of ancient and contemporary teachings being prioritised in today's Yoga lifestyles. I was also given the opportunity to learn about the



embodied philosophy of union that the women claimed as the basis for their continued dedication to the practices of Yoga.

Designing this research, I found many ways that the philosophies of Yoga and feminisms could compliment each other (as illustrated in Chapter Three) (Berila, 2016). An interest in ethics, care, depth and connection inspired me to situate this research in the framework of an embodied, feminist ethnography. In this thesis, I illustrate how women's embodied experiences in Yoga lifestyles can be articulated with the help of feminist theory. I offer an approach to research that responds to embodied and affective experiences as instrumental in the analysis process. The dialogue that is built between theory and experience herein contributes to (and expands upon) research that examines women's understandings of Yoga, lifestyles and/or contemporary movement practices (Baxter, 2020; Barbour, 2018b; Buckingham, 2017; Clark & Thorpe, 2019; Humberstone, 2013; Markula, 2019; Wheaton, 2010).

## **Who cares about Yoga lifestyles?**

The question contained in this heading is one that I was asked regularly over the course of this project. My response was often accompanied by statistics around the growing prevalence of Yoga in contemporary societies. Yoga is one of the fastest growing leisure pursuits in Aotearoa/New Zealand. A recent poll amongst adults revealed that over sixteen percent of the population participated in Yoga throughout 2018 (Sport New Zealand, 2018). Immersing myself in various communities (both yogic and not) in different parts of the world,<sup>5</sup> I often find that most individuals I encounter are either aware of Yoga, do Yoga, or know of someone who has tried Yoga. Below, White (2012) offers his opinion on Yoga as a contemporary and popular movement culture:

Over the past decades, yoga has become part of the Zeitgeist of affluent western societies, drawing housewives and hipsters, New Agers and the old-aged, and body culture and corporate culture into a multibillion-dollar synergy. Like every Indian cultural artifact that it has embraced, the West views Indian yoga as an ancient, unchanging tradition, based on revelations received by the Vedic sages who, seated in the lotus pose, were

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<sup>5</sup> Including: Australia, Central America, Europe, New Zealand, North America, Southeast Asia.

the Indian forerunners of the flat-tummied yoga babes who grace the covers of such glossy periodicals as the Yoga Journal and Yoga International. (p. 1)

Yoga is an ancient lifestyle system with a lineage that traces back thousands of years (Ivtzan & Jegatheeswaran, 2015). As a commercial enterprise, Yoga has become a practice that is marketed and promoted through various media outlets (Cowans, 2016; Markula, 2014). It is also a contemporary movement modality that is increasingly being recommended in clinical settings (Salmon, Lush, Jablonski & Sephton, 2009; Sullivan, Moonaz, Weber, Taylor & Schmalzl, 2018; Wainapel, Rand, Fishman & Halstead-Kenny, 2015). As such, there is much confusion over which practices are most beneficial amongst daily life.

Beyond this, there is much frustration over recommendations to simply add Yoga, mindfulness and meditation to extremely busy schedules as practices that can heal and/or solve many mental and physical ailments without consideration of more broadly defined pressures facing women today (Purser, 2019). As a leisure pursuit, Yoga is widely known, and yet, there is little academic research revealing which practices remain relevant for long-term practitioners who are committing to this way of life. Although many publications promote Yoga, there remains no research that inquires into ways that this lifestyle may be increasing (or decreasing) quality of life for women practitioners.

When asked to define a Yoga lifestyle, often individuals mention their perceptions of ‘yogis’ as individuals who prioritise diet, environmentalism, and discipline (Buckingham, 2017; Miller, 2016). Stereotypes associated with Yoga arise out of discursive formations that have generated over many years and through various publications (Cowans, 2016; Markula, 2014; Vertinsky, 2012). While some Yoga stereotypes may be perpetuated in the Yoga community, women’s nuanced and varied versions of contemporary Yoga lifestyles are not adequately represented in media (Webb, Vinosky, Warren-Findlow, Padro, Burris & Suddreth, 2017).

The vast teachings of Yoga and the range of practitioners embodying practices through extremely different lifestyles provides interesting content for this thesis. As mentioned,

Yoga is a philosophical and ethical lifestyle system that includes a wide range of teachings (Buckingham, 2017; Feuerstein & Weber, 1998; Jain, 2014). While it is possible to access many teachings on Yoga lifestyles, there are no publications focusing on the varied and lived experiences of contemporary women grappling with actualising these practices throughout their daily lives.

Immersed amongst Yoga communities, with other women practitioners demonstrating perceived mastery over mind and body, I was intrigued by the potential of learning about the lifestyle practices of these women. Noting a lack of adequate representation of long-term women practitioners, I became curious as to the extent that my research could expand upon previous Yoga lifestyle literature (predominantly written by men). Many questions filled my mind: which practices do women practitioners find most relevant throughout their daily lives? Do they wake up at five every morning? Do they occasionally allow a glass of wine? Have any of the women reached enlightened states of bliss? Do they become anxious when thinking about the global economy? This questioning prompted a desire to learn more broadly from contemporary women practitioners.

## **Expanding understandings**

Yoga is an increasingly popular, widely influential practice (Park, Braun & Siegel, 2015). Today, a diversifying range of practitioners interested in adopting Yoga lifestyles throughout their daily lives is steadily expanding. As such, it seems both timely and appropriate that the nuanced experiences of dedicated Yoga lifestyle practitioners be articulated in academic publications. Furthermore, considering that Yoga is being administered in a range of societal settings and with populations of various ages, it is important to inquire into the multiple ways that these teachings are shifting the lives of dedicated practitioners over the course of a lifetime.

Yoga is now being taught in schools, prisons and corporate environments (Mostafa-Kamel, 2014; Tilley, 2017; Vertinsky, 2015). It is being researched in clinical settings to identify the extent to which these practices can ameliorate a vast array of psychological and physical conditions (Ivtzan & Jegatheeswaran, 2015; Jackson, 2019). Yet, to date, there remain no studies that question long-term practitioners about their

lived experiences of embodying the wider philosophical and ethical system of Yoga in contemporary times. At this point, research on Yoga lifestyles can benefit from a more in-depth inquiry with experienced practitioners.

Similarly, amongst popular sources, only a limited range of Yoga guidebooks offering individualised and specific recommendations for living with Yoga are being published (Desikachar, 1995; Iyengar, 2005). These guidebooks are limiting in that they often present a regimented style of Yoga delivered by an authoritative individual (frequently male) within the Yoga community. In recent years, prominent women teachers have published books on living alongside Yoga (Farhi, 2003; Jagat, 2017). Expanding the discussion on Yoga lifestyles to include the voices of popular women teachers challenges the authoritative power over Yoga knowledge that remains in the hands of male gurus. This can be viewed as a positive step towards a more inclusive practice, however, the range of women publishing (and featured) in research could further benefit from more diversity in body size, age, ethnicity and socio-economic status (Ballard & Kripalani, 2016).

Reflecting upon who controls the discourse<sup>6</sup> that surrounds a Yoga lifestyle, I am interested in making space for a wider variety of women's voices from different Yoga communities. Learning amongst incredibly knowledgeable women, living Yoga lifestyles that arise out of a diverse range of conditions, influenced who I chose as participants for this study. This awareness brought me to consider searching for practitioners who are consistently and quietly living this way of life in smaller communities and with less exposure.

## **Prioritising women's insights**

As mentioned above, for this work I chose to work with 19 women situated in the Waikato region of Aotearoa/New Zealand. Drawing upon observations, interviews,

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<sup>6</sup> I recognise the term 'discourse' as a concept that is used widely. In this context, I draw on Markula's (2014) distinction between Foucault's understanding of 'discourse' and 'discursive formations.' Discourse offers a socially and culturally constructed set of conditions around a particular construct. Discursive formations are "established whenever one could describe a system or regularity between objects, statements, concepts, and thematic choices" (Markula, 2014, p. 144). Further, I consider discourse to be always intricately connected to matter in lived experiences (Barad, 2007; Fullagar, 2017, 2019; Markula, 2019; Van der Tuin, 2011).

focus groups, journals and my own embodied experiences moving amongst this feminist ethnography, I embraced the opportunity to gain insight into the lifestyle practices of contemporary women Yoga practitioners. At the onset of this research, I could not have understood the extent to which it might be important to feature the voices of women.

My decision to work with women was met with varying intensities of resistance over the course of this study. The range of comments I received always gave me the opportunity to pause and reflect. Below, I offer a vignette that captures a conversation shared at a local Yoga studio. The studio graciously allowed me to hang a recruitment poster on their community board (see Appendix 2). The recruitment poster clearly asks for women practitioners interested in participating in Yoga lifestyle research. In response to this poster, I had many men and women approach me to share their opinions. Below, I offer an exchange with a man I had met previously and knew to be a devout practitioner. I consider he and his wife to be very compassionate individuals, as such, I did not anticipate the content of the following interaction (a pseudonym is used for the purposes of anonymity):

*Ken: So you're researching Yoga lifestyles?*

*Allison: Yes, it's very exciting.*

*Ken: But you are only talking to women? I find that really offensive. If you don't mind me saying, I think it's a bit sexist.*

*Allison: Yes, it was a hard choice to make, but I think it will be a really big contribution.*

*Ken: I think you'll be missing out not hearing from all of us.*

*Allison: I totally get how you feel, it's frustrating feeling left out.*

My final response very subtly points to the fact that women in Yoga are often underrepresented, or in some cases, completely removed from the discussion (Chakravarti, 1993; Serbaeva, 2015). It has only been in recent years (since the 1950s), that women have been formally 'allowed' to practice *āsana* (Goldberg, 2015; Vertinsky, 2012). After immersing myself in feminist research on Yoga lifestyles, I am now aware of the deeply entrenched male lineage of Yoga. Furthermore, I have witnessed how the discursive formation around authority in Yoga that places men as the gatekeepers to

ancient Yoga knowledge remains influential for many contemporary practitioners (Davies, 2013; Lea, 2009; Leledaki, 2014; Markula, 2014).

The history of guru-disciple relationships and male dominance bordering on worship continues to infiltrate the minds of practitioners today (Davies, 2013; Tichenor, 2007). There are many contemporary practitioners challenging the guru model of Yoga and hierarchical lineages, and yet, there remain many male gurus encouraging this devotional model of practice even today (Fish, 2006; Wildcroft, 2018). As such, moments, like the one offered above, were common throughout this research process and reminded me of the importance of this project. My research decisions indicate a considered attempt at disrupting authoritative dominance in Yoga and broadening understandings of the lived experiences for dedicated women practitioners.

### ***Different voices***

Importantly, as well as prioritising women's voices, this work features insights from women with varying degrees of visibility amongst their communities. Some own studios, some live off-grid and have relatively less contact with others, some are Yoga teachers, others are stay-at-home moms or nine-to-five office workers. Variety in vocation and visibility was an important feature of this research.

Along with the explosion of Yoga as a commodity that can bring great commercial gain, recent years have seen an increasing number of online Yoga teachers amassing huge followings. These teachers, for better or for worse, are influencing large populations of individuals through their platforms (Miller, 2016). The dissemination of Yoga lifestyle teachings remains in the hands of individuals in positions of authority. Today, while there are countless women Yoga teachers with immense knowledge around these embodied lifestyle practices, the power over this knowledge remains amongst a very small group of individuals who are widely known throughout their communities. As such, there is a need for a wider range of women's voices to be featured in published articles on Yoga. This research attends to this by featuring a range of women living very different Yoga lifestyles.

## **Key concepts**

Over the following pages, I present a selection of key concepts that are developed over the course of this thesis. Below, I acknowledge the range of scholars who have previously wrestled with applying these terms in academic settings and describe how I am engaging with these concepts in this research. They include: lifestyle, embodiment and ethics.

### ***Lifestyle***

Stebbins (1997) suggests that ethnographic studies could benefit from distinct definitions around the ways that researchers are conceptualising the term ‘lifestyle’ within specific contexts. Below, I offer a definition from Stebbins (1997) that provides inspiration towards rethinking lifestyles:

A lifestyle is a distinctive set of shared patterns of tangible behavior that is organised around a set of coherent interests or social conditions or both, that is explained and justified by a set of related values, attitudes, and orientations and that, under certain conditions, becomes the basis for a separate, common social identity for its participants. (Stebbins, 1997, p. 350)

Stebbins’ (1997) description of the relationship between common interests, values and identities is a definition that guides my thinking through this process. In this project, I am interested in how the women are embodying certain values and curious about the ways that these values are guiding the women’s decisions throughout their daily lives. In relation to Yoga lifestyle practices, I see benefit in considering how the choices made by contemporary practitioners are indicative of self-identity amongst a broader movement culture that places value on a range of ethical Yoga teachings finding origin in ancient texts.

Yoga, unlike dance or aerobics, is accompanied by a set of rules for living a Yoga lifestyle. Teachings from ancient texts remain influential for contemporary practitioners and provide another element of consideration when individuals are attempting to live according to the expected standards of this movement culture. To understand lifestyle

formations is to contemplate the range of socio-cultural influences impacting the habitual patterns for various groups of individuals throughout daily life (Cockerham, Rütten & Abel, 2011; Stebbins, 1997). In Yoga, this includes an understanding of the teachings that arise out of ancient Yoga texts, namely the *Yoga sūtras of Patañjali* (see Appendix 3, described in more detail in Chapter Two). As Cockerham (2005) writes, “knowing a person’s lifestyle explains a great deal about the person” (p. 132). I would further add that gaining insight into the lifestyle choices of a person who is dedicated to a movement practice explains a great deal about the values of that particular culture.

Beyond values and ethical practices of Yoga, I am interested in how the term lifestyle has been recently analysed by feminist scholars researching moving bodies. These researchers are considering how the unique formations of power that are present in movement cultures may be influencing women’s lifestyle choices as gendered moving bodies (Markula, 2014; Thorpe, 2008; Throsby, 2013). Further, some feminist scholars are interested in how lifestyle choices can inform consumption practices (Olive, 2015b; Wheaton, 2010). Feminist lifestyle sport research reveals that (often) women in these movement practices desire to fit amongst cultural groups and adjust their consumption practices to reflect the values prioritised in each context (Wheaton, 2010). While understanding consumptive lives can provide insight into physical cultures, as noted by Atkinson (2010), in some alternative sporting cultures the value of ‘authenticity’ detracts from social expectation to consume and conform.

All of this has relevance when conceptualising the term ‘lifestyle’ in Yoga research. Yoga is a contemporary movement practice that, in recent years, has become a lucrative business attracting new practitioners through a form of spiritual consumerism (Lavrence & Lozanski, 2014; Rindfleish, 2005). However, it is also a practice that encourages personal awareness and moderation. In my discussion of Yoga as a contemporary lifestyle, I consider how multiple influences (including teachings from ancient texts as well as clever marketing schemes) are all contributing to the ways that women practitioners are forming their identities and associated lifestyles around cultural values that are both ancient and contemporary.



## ***Embodiment***

Embodiment, like the concept of lifestyle, holds different meanings in various contexts. It also holds much relevance within this current feminist ethnographic study on women's lived experiences in Yoga. Amongst the writing that follows, I describe inspirations along a journey to understanding how I work with embodiment in this project. The following quote from Barbour (2004) inspired me to consider the ways that I could gather insight on Yoga lifestyles by inquiring into the lived experiences of women engaging with the teachings of Yoga:

Mind/body dualism needed to be challenged and articulated differently, potentially through valuing and understanding 'embodiment.' In critique of the knowledge/experience dualism, feminists and phenomenologists have suggested that 'knowing' could be based on lived experience. (p. 227)

Similar to Barbour (2004), I consider embodiment to be not solely indicative of a considered attempt to breakdown mind-body dualisms, but also a method through which knowing can be gathered as women process and learn through their lived experiences. Theories on embodiment, as the experience of being in a body, do not prioritise natural/corporeal over social/cultural formations, but considers how learning and moving through a range of influences in daily life requires the presence of a body (Barbour, 2018b). Feminist scholars interested in embodiment understand the term to be not merely biologically or socially constructed. Barbour (2004) suggests that there are multiple formations that may be contributing to any given embodied experience:

From my perspective, 'embodiment' incorporated many things as one; a person's biological (somatic), intellectual, emotional, bodily, social, gendered, artistic and spiritual experience, within their cultural and geographical location. I want to emphasise now that embodiment is not arbitrary – it does include recognition of individual diversity in terms of race, gender, sexuality, ability, history and culture. (p. 230)

Barbour (2004) understands embodiment to be an experience that is at the same time epistemological and ontological, an entanglement of knowing and being brought to life through material form. In this research, I also understand embodiment as a lived

experience that is influenced by a number of factors. Importantly, like Shildrick (2015), I do not consider the lived body to be interchangeable with a physical fleshy form. Within this research, I consider how the lived body extends beyond the boundaries of the skin to connect with both human and non-human materiality. Like Barbour (2004), I recognise that while embodied experiences are comprised of multiple influences, this interconnectivity is “not arbitrary” and includes “recognition of individual diversity” (p. 230).

Csordas (1990, 1994), describes embodiment as a state of continual becoming with the world. In this research, I am moving amongst this embodied ethnography and am mutually implicated in its perpetual motion. My understanding of embodiment connects with theories from feminist new materialisms and posthumanisms (Barad, 2007; Braidotti, 2013). These bodies of work are referenced regularly throughout this thesis. Conceptualising embodiment as a lived experience that is in perpetual motion and connected to all materiality (both human and non-human) presented me with a unique tension to resolve when working through qualitative and embodied methods. Importantly, my approach to both posthumanism and feminist new materialisms is inclusive of lived experience. Below, I offer a quote from Coole and Frost (2010) that helps to explain my understanding of embodiment as a continual becoming with matter:

One could conclude, accordingly, that “matter becomes” rather than “matter is.” It is in these choreographies of becoming that we find cosmic forces assembling and disintegrating to forge more or less enduring patterns that may provisionally exhibit internally coherent, efficacious organization: objects forming and emerging within relational fields, bodies composing their natural environment in ways that are corporeally meaningful to them, and subjectivities being constituted as open series of capacities or potencies that emerge hazardedly and ambiguously within a multitude of organic and social processes. (Coole & Frost, 2010, p. 10)

Coole and Frost’s (2010) notion of interconnectivity between all “organic and social processes” (p. 10) involved in a state of being that is forever becoming is a driving philosophical stance that is discussed throughout the entirety of this project.

## *Ethics*

A definition of ethics can be traced back to ancient Greece and discussions around designing a moral code for living well (Ergas, 2014). Generally, a consideration of ethics in social science research surrounds how morality is defined by and upheld within cultural settings (Dale & Latham, 2015; Ergas, 2014; Markula, 2003). Markula (2003) acknowledges Foucault's suggestion that "we can benefit from the Greeks' understanding of a code of moralities...an understanding of morality derived from individual examination of the meaning of ethics" (p. 99). In this interpretation of ethics, the individual assumes an active role in creating personally relevant understandings of right and wrong behaviour. This contrasts discussions that consider ethics to be moral practices based on societal definitions. In this research, I consider the ways that ethical practices are both culturally and individually defined. Below, I describe how ethical practices are informing this research and highlight the ways that I am finding personally meaningful engagements with the culturally defined moral codes of both Yoga and feminisms.

In feminist research, ethics inform the ways that academics are immersing themselves in the field of inquiry. Below, I describe how a feminist ethics of care influenced this work. In the quote that follows, Toombs, Gross, Bardzell and Bardzell (2017) provide a definition of feminist care ethics:

Care ethics is a moral philosophy that developed within feminist theory and engages with the ethical, moral and value implications of care (Gilligan, 1977; Hamington, 2009; Noddings, 2013; Tronto, 1993). Care ethics is often positioned as an alternative to consequentialist and deontological ethical theories, which attempt to characterize the morality of an action based on that action's outcomes or the degree to which that action obeys a set of pre-established rules, respectively. Where care ethics differs is in its focus on the particular contexts, narratives or interdependent relationships between the individuals implicated in said action. (p. 47)

In this study, I adopted an ethics of care (alternatively known as "care ethics") (Toombs, et al, 2017) prioritising interpersonal relationships and the value of benevolence

(Gilligan, 1982). As will be described throughout this thesis, I took considered efforts in extending the most care possible for all participants. Ellis (2007) expands to discuss a relational ethics of care as informed by the work of Nel Noddings (1984). She states that, “relational ethics of care are ongoing, uncertain processes” and, when working closely with others, “one is never finished making ethical decisions” (Ellis, 2007, p.17). I considered care throughout the entirety of this research and prioritised both care and *ahimsā* (as the ethical Yoga practice of kindness) in this research.

Recommendations for living Yoga lifestyles often include ethical practices. In the most popular ancient Yoga lifestyle text, the *Yoga sūtras of Patañjali*, a range of ethical teachings are recommended (Feuerstein & Wilber, 1998). The *yamas* (reflections of authenticity) and *niyamas* (affirmative actions) provide practitioners with a code of ethics that are still prioritised by Yoga practitioners in contemporary times (Devi, 2010). These include: *ahimsā*, *satya*, *astheya*, *brahmacharya*, *aparigraha*, *saucha*, *santosha*, *tapas*, *svadhyaya*, *ishvara pranidhana* (see Appendix 1 for translations). In this thesis, I investigate the ways that the women of this study are engaging with these ethical principles and am curious to learn how these are being adopted and adapted throughout the women’s daily lives.

Teachings from Yoga texts have been translated over many years and these varied interpretations offer multiple ways to engage with ethical practices. The glossary of terminology (Appendix 1) highlights these variations by offering a number of associated translations from multiple sources. As an example of this differentiation, I describe the teaching of *brahmacharya*. The principle of *brahmacharya*, in recent years, has been translated as finding a “balance and moderation of vital life force” (Devi, 2010, p. 164). In an earlier translation, it is found to mean “continence” and “celibacy” (Satchidananda, 1978, p. 238). These are vastly different translations with very different ramifications when applied in a lifestyle context. Where one refers to conserving energy (which can be interpreted variously), the other very clearly states conservation of sexual energy through abstinence. These are quite different practices.

In this thesis, I am interested in revealing the ways that women practitioners are making sense of Yoga’s ancient ethical teachings. Their adaptations may offer insight into ways that these teachings retain relevance in contemporary times. I am further interested in

how a dialogue between yogic and feminist ethical principles can support my decisions in a research setting. In the aforementioned ways, this research may be able to offer contemporary translations guided by women's embodied and lived experiences and provide insight into ways that various ethical practices can mutually inform research.

Contained herein is a journey towards reconceptualising the concepts of lifestyle, embodiment and ethics as informed by women Yoga practitioners and articulated with the help of contemporary feminist theory. Throughout these pages, these concepts evolve as this discussion progresses and builds towards new understandings. Below, I offer an overview of this thesis to illustrate the direction that I am taking towards rethinking these concepts in Yoga lifestyle research.

## **Thesis overview**

In the pages that follow, I present my research with contemporary women Yoga practitioners. Working within an embodied ethnography and articulating a lived experience that is interconnected, this thesis brings women's insights into dialogue with feminist theories through a process that is in continual motion. Throughout this work, I consider multiple influences and draw upon the women's embodied knowledge to guide a deep process of inquiry.

Chapter Two is a literature review that presents a history of Yoga lifestyles. In this review, I return to ancient texts to inquire into how Yoga practitioners were living their lives and then follow themes in lifestyle practices over time. I draw upon what has been written about Yoga lifestyles over many years to question the breadth of the story that has been passed down. In this way, I challenge the authority that has historically claimed intellectual ownership over the teachings of Yoga (Fish, 2006; Leledaki, 2014). This literature review draws upon ancient and popular Yoga texts to present an overview of the dominant discursive formations that surround Yoga lifestyles. I analyse academic literature to understand how Yoga lifestyles are being represented in research settings.

In the literature review, I discuss the representation of Yoga lifestyles and find inspiration for broadening understandings through the innovative practices of

contemporary feminist theorists and lifestyle research scholars. I offer a brief overview of the development of feminisms then engage with particular bodies of feminist literature and theorists that greatly influenced this work. This includes discussion of embodiment, Yoga research and lifestyles in moving bodies. I cover literature from academics researching sport, physical culture and movement that are interested in theorising the moving body. To finish, I provide rationale for my engagement with theories of new materialisms, Karen Barad, agential realism, posthumanism, and Rosi Braidotti.

The process of methodological design is discussed in Chapter Three. This chapter begins with a philosophical discussion outlining my approach to paradigm, theory, method and representation as an entangled, non-linear process of discovery. From this place, I describe how feminist ethnographic research has informed this present work then present my design for (what I define as) an entangled ethnography. I offer a description of Karen Barad's (2003, 2007) concept of entanglement as applied in this methodology and suggest an entangled approach to feminist ethnographic work on Yoga lifestyles that combines both feminist and yogic principles in a research setting. I then articulate how both feminist and yogic concepts are supporting my ethico-ontopistemological framework in this entangled ethnographic approach. From this point, I introduce the participants through their autobiographies.

Working with traditional ethnographic methods (observations, interviews, focus groups, journals and my own embodied practices) whilst drawing upon feminist theory and Yoga philosophy, I find fertile ground for inquiry. Analysing my research process, I describe my placement as an embodied researcher taking multiple roles. As an intimate insider working closely with practitioners, I face unique ethical situations throughout this study. The benefits, and challenges, of close relationships in research are described. Finally, I reflect on my process of thematic analysis that allowed for a continual becoming of understanding alongside contemporary women practitioners.

Findings are separated into three chapters revealing the women's experiences of lifestyles, embodiment and ethics. Chapter Four is the first of three findings chapters. In this chapter, I describe the women's journeys in contemporary Yoga lifestyles and present their lived experiences alongside current feminist scholarship. Discussion in this

chapter illustrates how women's contemporary Yoga lifestyles are indicative of individualised journeys towards personally meaningful practices for experiencing union. This chapter follows the women as they navigate a range of influences whilst continually dedicating themselves to the practices of Yoga. The women find pathways through multiple knowledge sources that are both ancient and contemporary. They experience getting lost, turning away, coming back and finding new meanings through their varied experiences in Yoga. I discuss the challenges the women face as they struggle with identity and discursive formations around discipline and self-mastery while adopting new lifestyle choices amongst neoliberal, consumer-driven societies.

In this chapter, I analyse how finding pathways through multiple influences to continually arrive at 'authentic' Yoga lifestyles is a process of becoming that finds the women building personally meaningful lives. Recognising that the women of this study are continually turning inwards for guidance, I suggest that the authority in Yoga is shifting as women consider themselves to be the gurus of their own lives. I finish this chapter with a vignette of evocative writing outlining my personal experiences journeying alongside the practices of Yoga over time in the search for an elusive 'authenticity' and a neverending bliss (*samadhi*).

Chapter Five presents the concept of an entangled Yoga body in analysing the women's experiences embodying Yoga as union. I begin this chapter offering rationale for my use of feminist new materialisms. Barad's (2003, 2007) concept of entanglement is brought into a dialogue with the women's embodied experiences of yogic union. I make reference to how entanglement has been used in various research settings and briefly explain its use within this chapter. In Chapter Five, I engage with the concept of 'entanglement' to consider the influence of both human and non-human phenomena, the agency of materiality, and the ways that multiple formations are mutually implicated and intra-acting in a state of continual becoming (Barad, 2007). I present examples that demonstrate how the women of this study are describing their experiences of yogic union.

From here, I consider the difficulty in languaging a dialogue between complex theory and embodied experiences. As such, I chose to represent Yoga bodies as entities that are always entangled and always in motion. To help describe this complex concept tangibly,

I offer three specific examples. The breath, Yoga mats and the heart are used to represent an entangled Yoga body as a material-discursive entity that is inextricably linked to both human and non-human materiality. Using the women's embodied experiences of these examples, discursive formations around each concept and evocative writing, this section attempts to articulate entanglement through multiple styles of expression and varied knowledge sources.

The last empirical chapter, Chapter Six, moves to discuss the ethically informed practices of Yoga that the women are engaging with throughout their daily lives. Before presenting findings, I describe how I am engaging with posthuman theory to articulate the women's understandings of ethics. I compare the women's consistent, continual acts of Yoga ethics to Rosi Braidotti's (2019) writing on generative life and affirmative ethics. I describe how Yoga practitioners can be conceptualised as posthuman knowing subjects who are embodied and embedded amongst their daily life. In their daily choices, the women are bringing awareness to the many generative influences that are present in any given situation. Amidst multiple distractions, they are attempting to take action according to personal interpretations of ethical Yoga teachings. I suggest the teachings of Yoga to be both current and antiquated through the women's adaptation of ancient teachings amongst contemporary settings. Considering the generative nature of Yoga teachings, I reflect on how translations of ethical practices have changed over time. In this chapter, I discuss how contemporary practitioners are finding relevance and new meanings for certain ethical teachings of Yoga. This discussion offers three specific ethical Yoga practices from the *Yoga sūtras of Patañjali* (*ahimsā*/kindness, *saucha*/simplicity, *santosha*/active acceptance) (see Appendix 3) and considers their adaptation over time. I describe the women's ethically-informed Yoga lifestyles as continually generating, informed by multiple influences, and conscientiously being brought to life through daily affirmative practices. I suggest that this ethical way of living is a definitive feature of a contemporary Yoga lifestyle and present varied examples of the women making ethical choices while carefully responding to the unique contexts of their daily lives.

The ways that the women are adopting and adapting the ethical practices of Yoga offers potential for rethinking the purpose of Yoga in contemporary times. As informed by the women's experiences, I indicate how old interpretations of Yoga as a lifestyle that



brings enlightenment is not the aspiration that inspires the women of this study to dedicate themselves to Yoga. I finish this chapter discussing the women's reasons behind committing to living ethically-informed Yoga lifestyles. As this chapter reveals, the women's embodiment of everyday ethics as consistent, continual acts of varying degrees are providing them with personally meaningful ways to contribute towards a shared vision of an affirmative future. It is this hope in the future that inspires them to continue embodying practices of kindness and acceptance with faith and dedication.

In the final chapter of this thesis I present the contributions of this research, overview main findings, and reflect on my experiences throughout this process. I begin by overviewing the unique methodological structure of an entangled ethnography that I designed through a dialogue between feminist and yogic knowledges. I discuss how entanglements evolved over the course of this research and provide insight into the range of entangled concepts that were most influential in this feminist ethnography on Yoga. After presenting an overview of the main entanglements, I focus on the ways that my understandings of yogic union and entanglement were instrumental in this process. I suggest how an entangled research project can be helpful in further research on Yoga and/or lifestyles of women in other movement cultures. From here, I present the main contributions of this research. I then return to the key concepts described in this introduction and illustrate how I have developed thinking around lifestyles, embodiment and ethics over the course of this thesis. Reflecting on the entire process, I describe ways that this study may have been limited and suggest potential for future research. In my experiences as an entangled, feminist ethnographer and intimate insider, I offer suggestions for reflexive research strategies that can inform future feminist research. This thesis concludes with a discussion on continual becomings that are filled with hope.

## **Chapter Two: Literature review**

### **Women's experiences in Yoga and lifestyles**

To understand the literature that inspires this research on Yoga lifestyles requires an overview of a range of information over years of continual evolution within a practice that is consistently expanding. Throughout the first portion of this chapter, I engage with literature that has impacted the development of Yoga lifestyle practices over time. While there are only a few publications that feature women living Yoga lifestyles today, there are many academic and yogic texts that use the words 'Yoga lifestyle.' These are discussed throughout. As an ancient philosophical, physical and ethical lifestyle practice, Yoga has roots in texts that have evolved over thousands of years and continue to influence practitioners' lived experiences (Ivtzan & Jegatheeswaran, 2015; White, 2012). As such, this chapter experiments with the standard structural format of a literature review to welcome a broader range of knowledge sources that include popular Yoga texts as well as those that are academic.

Popular Yoga texts, as well as a range of academic publications over time are contributing towards the ways that I am conceptualising Yoga lifestyles as lived value systems informed by various influences. Throughout the entirety of this thesis, I weave together knowledge sources in an attempt to challenge the notion that one way of knowing holds priority over others (Barret, 2015; Bost, 2016; Kaufmann, 2017). My analysis of dominant epistemologies in Yoga is discussed more rigorously throughout the methodology chapter of this thesis. For the purposes of this literature review, it is helpful to signpost my desire to break down hierarchies around knowledge production and authority.

This literature review follows the evolution of the term 'Yoga lifestyle' and analyses how understandings of this concept have shifted over time. After discussing the influence of ancient teachings on current Yoga lifestyle practices, I present a range of contemporary academic literature that has informed this present work. I overview particular qualitative studies on Yoga and reflect on ways that theorists are conceptualising the moving body. This literature review covers a wide range of scholarship on Yoga, embodiment, women's moving bodies and lifestyle practices

arising out of feminist scholarship. Before discussing the range of feminist scholarship that influences this research, I offer an overview of feminisms. From this point, I analyse specific publications from feminist scholars in physical cultural studies and sport sociology then provide rationale for my use of new materialisms and posthumanisms as theoretical lenses that can offer new territory for broadening understandings of women's lived experiences in Yoga. The extent of literature covered is broad, and therefore, the articles that are discussed in greater depth are those that have most inspired this research.

## Ancient Yoga lifestyles

To gain deeper understanding around discursive formations that surround Yoga lifestyle practices, it is helpful to return to some of the ancient Yoga texts that remain influential for contemporary practitioners. The earliest mention of teachings associated with a Yoga lifestyle are found amongst Indian scriptures with estimated composition dates that range between 1700 and 1100 B.C.E., namely the *Rig Veda* (White, 2012). The *Rig Veda* is the oldest translatable Hindu text and is as important to a pious Hindu as the *Old Testament* is to a devout Christian (Feuerstein & Wilber, 1998). Within its 1,028 hymns and 10,600 verses, the *Rig Veda* outlines steps to enlightenment and offers three distinct lifestyle choices for Yoga practitioners interested in attaining liberation (Feuerstein & Wilber, 1998).

The values guiding pathways for ancient Yoga lifestyles arising out of *Vedic* texts include: *karma* (service), *jñāna* (wisdom), and *bhakti* (devotion) (Strauss, 2005). As an oral tradition, ancient teachings of Yoga were mostly inaccessible to the general public. Moving into the classical era of Yoga,<sup>7</sup> the further value of *raja* (discipline/practice) was inspired by the 8-limb lifestyle system of *ashtanga*<sup>8</sup> Yoga presented in the *Yoga sūtras of Patañjali*. Mentioned briefly in the introduction, the *Yoga sūtras of Patañjali* remain the most influential teachings today. This text offers guidelines around living

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<sup>7</sup> The Yoga eras are tentatively contained within the following years: 'vedic' (3000 B.C.E. to 500 B.C.E.), 'classical' (500 B.C.E. to 800 C.E.), 'post-classical' (800 C.E. – 1500 C.E.), 'modern' (1500 – present) (Feuerstein, 2003; Feuerstein & Wilber, 1998).

<sup>8</sup> There is a complexity that surrounds the word *ashtanga* as lineages of Yoga and a style of contemporary practice. In this thesis, I capitalise *Ashtanga-vinyāsa* in reference to a specific practice, whereas *ashtanga* is left lower case as it references a broader lineage (like *bhakti* or *karma*). Refer to Appendix 1 (Glossary of Terminology) for a more detailed description.

according to 8 limbs of an *ashtanga* Yoga lifestyle system (see Appendix 3). The *Yoga sūtras* were composed around 400 C.E. by the sage *Patañjali* and are said to contain the expanse of teachings from the epic *Vedas*<sup>9</sup> within 196 *sūtras* (verses) (Feuerstein & Wilber, 1998). These tightly written aphorisms offer a succinct and comprehensive guide to living the life of a ‘yogi’ (White, 2012). While there were other texts written during the classical era of Yoga (500 B.C.E. to 800 C.E.), the *Yoga sūtras* retain such widespread popularity that they are often referred to as classical Yoga.

Mentioning these ancient texts here, I draw attention to both their variation and continued relevance in the Yoga community. Both the *Yoga sūtras of Patañjali* and the *Rig Veda* contain teachings that were originally passed down orally (Feuerstein & Wilber, 1998). These seminal texts have been subject to numerous interpretations and much variation over many years (Bryant, 2015; Desikachar, 1995; Devi, 2010; Iyengar, 1993; Satchidananda, 1978). While today, practitioners may attribute their knowledge of these texts to an ancient lineage, it is unclear how much variation over time has ensued alongside various translations. The idea that an untouched ancient Yoga can be accessed through contemporary translations of teachings in popular guidebooks might be an unreasonable assumption (Maddox, 2015). Below, I reflect on the variation between interpretations in popular *Yoga sūtra* translations.

Millions of people are practicing Yoga globally and 76% of them identify as women (Park, Brown & Siegel, 2015). Considering that the *Yoga sūtras* comprise the most popular text on Yoga lifestyles, it is surprising that only one of the numerous translations of this prolific text has been written by a woman (Devi, 2010). Comparing Nischala Joy Devi’s (2010) interpretation of the *Yoga sūtras* to a popular translation by Sri Swami Satchidananda (1978), highlights the distinct differences between texts. Below, I offer two translations of the second *sūtra* in book one:

✱

***Sūtra 1.2: Yoga citta vritti nirodhah***

✱

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<sup>9</sup> The Vedas are four epic texts: *Rig Veda*, *Sama Veda*, *Yajur Veda* and *Atharva Veda*. Thought to be composed between 1700-500 B.C.E. (Feuerstein, 2003; Feuerstein & Wilber, 1998).

***Translation #1:***

*The restraint of the modifications of the mind-stuff is Yoga.*

*(Satchidananda, 1978, p. 3)*

***Translation #2:***

*Yoga is the uniting of the consciousness in the heart.*

*(Devi, 2010, p. 12)*

Through this example, the existence of variation in translation is evident. Where Satchidananda's (1978) example prioritises control of the mind, Devi's (2010) suggests a union with the heart. These are only two of the many translations of the *Yoga sūtras* that contemporary practitioners are referencing today. While I do not consider this variation of interpretation to be problematic, I exercise caution when one translation is presented as ultimate truth. When any singular, dogmatic representation of Yoga is considered to be 'essential' knowledge, the result is a limiting definition of Yoga. As Jain (2014) suggests, a selective reading of the *Yoga sūtras* by individuals capitalising on the knowledge contained in this expansive text can contribute to a narrow definition around what constitutes as Yoga.

***Understandings of ancient women practitioners***

Many contemporary practitioners believe that until recently (the past 100 years), men who were householders and women with family obligations were unable to completely dedicate themselves to the teachings of Yoga. As such, writing on ancient practitioners primarily features recluse, devout, male individuals (Singleton, 2010). While the stories of these ancient times portray early Yoga practitioners as solely male ascetics, it may be that these limited distinctions omit a large portion of women practitioners who have been engaging in Yoga lifestyles since its inception (Bevilacqua, 2018).

Today, practitioners are beginning to open to the idea that a wider range of practitioners may have been living Yoga lifestyles alongside the male ascetics of ancient India (Chakravarti, 1993; Kempton, 2013; Serbaeva, 2015). Chakravarti (1993) attributes India's history of patriarchy and gender/caste hierarchies under the Brahmanical social order to be responsible for this lack of representation for women. Mention of *yoginīs* (women practitioners) in early *tantra* Yoga texts describe "low-caste human women" (White, 2012, p.14) in Yoga as beings who were capable of embodying the supernatural

powers of goddesses. White (2012) describes how tantric texts suggested that sexual contact with *yoginīs* could gift male practitioners with transcendent abilities and potentially liberation. Recognising the objectification of women in ancient Yoga texts contributes to present understandings around traditional male authority. Further, historical representation of women may contribute to contemporary discursive formations that surround gendered Yoga bodies.

Although women may have been living Yoga lifestyles for many years, their daily practices are not recorded in ancient texts. Even today, there are very few publications that centre around the specific lifestyles of these individuals. As such, there is space for publications on the particular lifestyle practices of dedicated women Yoga practitioners.

## **Contemporary Yoga lifestyles**

Since the late 1800s, Yoga has experienced rapid growth. As different countries and cultural groups have adopted the teachings, the range of practitioners engaging in the practices of Yoga have diversified. This increased popularity of Yoga in new settings, in turn, expanded the range of styles available to students. Below, Brown and Leledaki (2010) describe a cross-cultural blending of knowledges:

there has been a dynamic interaction between Asian and Western representatives of various religious traditions over the last 150 years (De Michelis, 2004: 2). These interactions do illustrate that sufficient numbers of cultural exchanges have taken place both formally and informally for us to suspect that cultural blending of thought and practice is embedded (to various degrees) in the invented traditions emerging from modernities in both East and West. (p. 9)

In relation to Yoga lifestyles, the range of lineages and associated publications offering their own unique interpretations as to what constitutes this way of life are increasing. Today, with access to the internet, the range of teachings is expansive and immediately accessible. Continued blending of ancient and contemporary sources amongst a wide range of publications is contributing to a practice that is difficult to define. As a lifestyle practice that has evolved over a very long time, there continues to be little information

published on the experiences of contemporary women embodying Yoga lifestyles. Below, I analyse the popular publications by women that are influencing contemporary practitioners (and their lifestyle choices).

### ***Contemporary women practitioners***

Yoga lifestyle publications written by women are increasing alongside a growing population of women practitioners (Devi, 2010; Farhi, 2003; Goldberg, 2015; Jagat, 2017; Kempton, 2013). Recent popular publications on Yoga lifestyles written by women are challenging the historicity of male authority in Yoga (Farhi, 2003; Jagat, 2017). Today, however, some of the most influential women Yoga teachers may be found on social media sites.

The number of Yoga teachers in the West is growing exponentially with today's "Yogalebrities" (Bondy, 2020) on Instagram amassing huge numbers of followers all eager to learn from these 'influencers' (Balizet & Myers, 2016; Rosman, 2018). To learn about contemporary Yoga lifestyles, it is beneficial to understand whose voices are holding authority amongst the majority of practitioners that are increasingly present on social media (Lacasse, Santarossa, & Woodruff, 2019). Yoga lifestyle practices are experiencing a shift in authority, and as Cowans (2016) and Miller (2016) suggest, this change is influencing how practitioners engage with the teachings of Yoga. As women in visible positions of power adopt and adapt their understandings of ancient teachings, the practices are gaining new meanings (Cowans, 2016; Davies, 2013; Godrej, 2017). Choosing to feature popular Yoga lifestyle sources prior to academic literature indicates the importance of these aforementioned publications in women's daily lived experiences. From this point, I move to consider how the term 'Yoga lifestyle' is being used in academic publications.

## **Researching Yoga lifestyles**

As a topic for academic research, Yoga has continued to gain traction as an interesting topic for scientific analysis since the 1970s (Bhole & Karambelkar, 1971; Bhole, Karambelkar & Gharote, 1970; Goyeche, 1979; Patel & North, 1975). However, it was not until the early 2000s that the term 'Yoga lifestyle' was used in the titles of quantitative academic publications (Broad, 2012). Below, I offer an overview of the

type of Yoga lifestyle that these research projects promoted. I do not use the example below to suggest a comparison and judgement of methodological approach. Rather, I highlight this particular case to demonstrate how my use of the term Yoga lifestyle throughout this thesis differs from studies that recommend regimented and specific applications of Yoga.

Sat Bir Singh Khalsa is a respected researcher and experienced *Kundalini* Yoga teacher/practitioner who has published numerous papers around Yoga and lifestyle programming (Khalsa & Cope, 2006; Khalsa, S.B.S., Khalsa, G.S., Khalsa, H.K. & Khalsa, M.K., 2008; Khalsa, Shorter, Cope, Wyshak & Sklar, 2009). Here, I analyse one of his publications where he specifically uses the term ‘Yoga lifestyle’ in the title. For this particular study, Khalsa and Cope (2006) recruited ten students attending a high performing music academy to determine the extent to which a two-month Yoga lifestyle program might affect performance anxiety, high stress and musculoskeletal conditions. The eight students that completed the study participated in three Yoga *āsana* classes per week (on average) and one group counselling session. Academy students had access to vegan meals and *kirtan* (devotional singing) sessions, but attendance to these aspects of the program was not mandatory and not monitored. At the end of the program, the quantitative statistics revealed that the students were experiencing much less performance anxiety. The researchers mention being hesitant to draw too many conclusions based on the small group of participants, but suggest that a more broadly defined lifestyle could be beneficial to research in future projects.

Khalsa and Cope’s (2006) article defines ‘Yoga lifestyles’ as specific practices being applied over a defined range of time. This definition of lifestyle differs to how I am conceptualising the term throughout this research. As mentioned in the introduction, I engage with the term ‘lifestyles’ as continual attempts at living according to values that are embodied by members of a particular group. When compared to my definition, Khalsa and Cope’s (2006) article could more accurately be labelled as Yoga-based, lifestyle interventions. Khalsa and Cope, in authoritative positions as researchers, decided upon the components they felt were most relevant and included only these in their Yoga lifestyle prescription. Their inclusion of diet, meditation, *āsana* and philosophy offer insight into designing a two-month, Yoga-inspired intervention program. However, this limited presentation restricts the potential for the breadth and



depth of Yoga to be understood as teachings that are informing an entire lifestyle. When an individual practitioner engages with a wide range of Yoga lifestyle teachings (both contemporary and ancient) throughout daily life over a long period of time, there is potential for various nuanced interpretations. This complexity is impossible to contain inside a regimented Yoga lifestyle intervention.

As Mostafa-Kamel (2014) and Velazquez (2016) articulate, a broader perspective around contemporary Yoga lifestyles could benefit a growing population of practitioners that are increasingly diverse and engaging with Yoga differently. Qualitative research on Yoga offers the opportunity to gain insight into how academic scholars have been engaging with the topic of Yoga more broadly. These studies help to both inspire and point towards areas where this present Yoga lifestyle research can expand understanding.

## **Qualitative Yoga research**

Much research on Yoga has explored the health benefits for particular groups, with some adopting quantitative interventionist studies as mentioned above. However, over the past two decades researchers have also adopted qualitative approaches to understand the various socio-cultural influences, power formations and cultural norms that are present in Yoga practices (Atkinson, 2010, 2017; Ergas, 2014; Morley, 2001, 2008; Smith, 2007). The articles I mention, and the discussion that follows, features qualitative Yoga research that does not prioritise women's lifestyle experiences. These particular studies offer me the ability to discuss the range of ways that the philosophies of Yoga are being applied and analysed in research settings.

The qualitative research on Yoga that I am choosing to feature in this section highlights the unique ways that academics are bringing together various knowledge sources to arrive at embodied understandings of Yoga in research (McIlwain & Sutton, 2014; Smith, 2007). They are finding ways to combine the practices of Yoga with academic theory (Ergas, 2014; Morley, 2008). They are also using evocative and innovative methodologies (Atkinson, 2010, 2017). To begin, I discuss the ways that Morley (2008) locates commonality between two distinct bodies of knowledge through his philosophical writing on existential phenomenology and *tantra* Yoga.

Morley's (2008) article suggests potential congruences that can be found amongst the existential phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty and the tantric tradition of Yoga. He provides insight into the ways that different bodies of knowledge can dialogue between common themes "despite being severed across history and culture with no discernible intellectual links whatsoever" (Morley, 2008, p. 149). Through locating the ways that phenomenology and *tantra* can build mutual philosophical ground, Morley (2008) infers that through similarity and difference, these two bodies of knowledge can both compliment and build upon each other. While *tantra* offers an embodied practice for experiencing the cosmos, phenomenology presents the opportunity to theorise on the human body as both science and divinity in form. Morley (2008) suggests, "Yoga may offer phenomenology a much-needed somatic contemplative praxis, as much as phenomenology may offer yoga the basis for an appropriate theoretical articulation" (p. 144).

Morley's work is theoretical and historical. It offers a recommendation for weaving together bodies of knowledge, but does not offer insight into how this might be applied inside a research setting. In contrast, the writing of Atkinson (2010, 2017) offers insight into ways that research can utilise innovative methodologies and evocative writing to gain insight into Yoga. As an embodied researcher and practitioner, Atkinson uses his lived experiences to uncover unique characteristics of Yoga culture.

Articles featuring Yoga written by Atkinson (2010, 2017) offer unique perspectives and insider insights into the practice of *Ashtanga-vinyāsa* Yoga in Canada. While all of his articles have proven insightful, I focus on his most recent autoethnographic article *Ethnoesthesia* (Atkinson, 2017). Within this article, Atkinson offers evocative, personal writing to help readers gain understandings of both the practice of Yoga and the sensuality of sweat. He considers how fluids in physical cultures (like Yoga) can produce meaning and shape a broader aesthetic around moving bodies in cultures. "Ethnoaesthetic studies analyze radically contextual interpretations of what is considered pleasing, gritty, challenging or unsettling about mundane body movements, senses, corporeal leakages and embodied connections with others in specific physical cultures" (Atkinson, 2017, p. 65).

Atkinson (2017) articulates the connective and existential qualities of sweat amongst his *Ashtanga-vinyāsa* Yoga practice. He brings together his personal embodied experiences with practitioners' insights (as gathered through his ethnographic research) and weaves these alongside extensive historical and cultural academic sources. All of these elements add depth and breadth to his discussion. His work is evocative, personal and rigorous, yet, it does not prioritise the lived experiences of women. Informed by Atkinson's (2017) concept of ethnoaesthesia, I consider how the mundane and the material might influence women's lived experiences in Yoga lifestyles. Later in this chapter, I expand on materiality in a consideration of feminist new materialisms and suggest how thinking through these theories can open discussion on Yoga lifestyles into new territory. Before this, I offer an overview of the development of feminisms and compare the various feminist approaches that have been employed to analyse Yoga. This offers me the opportunity to both situate this research amongst a history of innovative scholarship and provide rationale for my decisions in this ethnography.

## **Feminisms**

As background to this feminist ethnography, I include a brief description of the aims and developments of feminisms. I note that an entire history of feminist thought and praxis is beyond the scope of this thesis. Therefore, in this section I briefly describe how I conceive of the history of feminisms and present a selection of scholars who have influenced my thinking (Ahmed, 2008; Butler, 1990; Collins, 1996; De Beauvoir, 1949; Greer, 1970; Haraway, 1991; Lorde, 1984; Wolf, 1991).

The history and current breadth of feminisms is vast, multi-layered and rapidly expanding (Olesen, 2011). Over time, feminist theorists have critically examined women's lives in their attempts at unravelling structural systems of power that build oppressive conditions in daily life. Through making space for women's voices and experiences, feminist theorists find ways to challenge dominant discursive formations to reimagine practices towards freedom (Flores, 1996; Markula, 2003).

Often the development of feminist theory and praxis is presented as arising through a series of waves. The first wave was predominantly concerned with liberal agendas such as obtaining the right to vote and work, the second (often characterised as radical

feminism) focused on activism and challenging traditional gender roles (Greer, 1970; Laughlin, Gallagher, Cobble, Boris, Nadasen, Gilmore, Zarnow, 2010). Amid criticism, a third wave began to challenge the goals of second-wave feminists. This wave made considered attempts to introduce more diverse voices to encourage new ideologies and strategies promoting multiple identities at intersections of race, class, gender and sexual preference (Butler, 1990; Collins, 1993; Laughlin et al., 2010). In recent years, a fourth wave is being identified as an activist movement mobilised through social media. This wave is enabling diverse and marginalised voices to share on an international platform (Fullagar & Pavlidis, 2018; Jackson, 2018). While the wave metaphor is often referenced in feminist literature, I agree with Caudwell's (2011) critique around the limitations that arise through these linear and temporal distinctions and similar to Laughlin et al. (2010), I see benefit in expanding understandings around the diverse range of feminisms occurring within each moment of time.

Caudwell (2011) argues that situating the breadth of feminist theorists within particular temporal movements that logically evolve from liberal to radical to postmodern and beyond promotes ideas of linearity and continual progress that are limiting. In her article, Caudwell (2011) suggests that these delineations miss the opportunity to understand the intersecting issues of race, gender, sexuality and class that are complex and existing within each era. Hemmings (2005) agrees that this temporal association of a certain type of feminist thought within a particular time frame binds decades to movements (for example, the 1990s with 'difference') and limits understanding around the multiple ways that oppression is being experienced at any given time (Hemmings, 2005).

Thinking through the history of feminisms, not as waves contained within decades, but as a genealogy of theories and practices with shared aims recognises the contributions of a diverse group of women over time. I acknowledge the scholarship of existential (De Beauvoir, 1949), radical (Greer, 1970), post-structural (Butler, 1990; Haraway, 1991) and intersectional (Ahmed, 2008; Collins, 1993, 2002) feminisms in the ways that they continue to expand understanding around oppression and power. The breadth of political and critical scholarship around lived experiences in gendered bodies can not be contained in this thesis. Its brief inclusion here highlights the lengthy and varied history of feminisms that remain influential for contemporary scholars.

Today, a range of feminist scholarship prompts me to consider how contemporary women's lives are multi-faceted, complex and power-laden. Feminisms continue to disrupt the barriers built between those in power and those without, the narratives of feminisms continue to diversify to include groups that are marginalised and/or underrepresented (Ahmed, 2008; Collins, 1993, 2002). Making space for an increasing body of literature from a growing population of theorists facilitates learning through stories arising out of the lived experiences of a broader range of individuals. In relation to this research, the aim of feminisms and the work of feminist scholars over time reminds me to consider the importance of this work and the ways that my choices can be political statements (Caudwell, 2011). In the pages that follow, I describe feminist contributions to understanding Yoga and highlight how choices in research can be political statements that prioritise women's experiences and make space for their understandings to find relevance in academia.

## **Feminist Yoga research**

Popular Yoga lifestyle texts (Devi, 2010; Satchidananda, 1978), quantitative Yoga lifestyle intervention studies (Khalsa & Cope, 2006; Yadav et al., 2012) and embodied work from male academics (Atkinson, 2017; Smith, 2007), as presented previously, constitute a body of literature around Yoga. Below, I analyse the work of feminist scholars from various disciplines and demonstrate how their research is expanding contemporary understandings of Yoga (Godrej, 2017; Maddox, 2015; Musial, 2011; Vertinsky, 2012). As a topic of inquiry, Yoga provides interesting material for feminist scholars. As Vertinsky (2012) writes:

It is a story that can be read in many different ways, notes Sarah Strauss, but one in which colonialism, nationalism, globalization, gender and body politics are all writ large (Strauss 2005, ix). Engaging yoga's long and complex history on the world stage is thus not for the faint of heart, but it is alluring to historians of physical culture examining the human body as a cultural text while exploring the roots and shoots of an 'assemblage' of movement practices and body techniques in modernity (Deleuze and Guattari 1982). (Vertinsky, 2012, p. 518)

Recent publications inquire around various populations (Humberstone & Cutler-Riddick, 2015; Mostafa-Kamel, 2014) using intersectional analyses (Berila, Klein & Roberts, 2016), phenomenology (Champ, 2013; Leledaki, 2014), ethnography (Bailly, 2014; Buckingham & Degen, 2012; Tilley, 2017), content and discourse analysis (Hyde, 2013; Markula, 2014; Webb et al., 2017) whilst experimenting with evocative writing (Bost, 2016; Popovic, 2012) to learn about women in Yoga. Below, I present a range of feminist scholarship on Yoga discussing significant contributions that have expanded my thinking around researching Yoga and suggest how this present work contributes to the literature.

Two recent publications by Markula (2014) and Webb et al. (2017) analyse the use of imagery and words found on the covers of popular Yoga magazines. Webb et al. (2017) look at three prominent magazines to uncover themes around Yoga bodies and the use of Yoga philosophy alongside imagery in different contexts. Looking at the covers of the *Yoga Journal* from the 1970s to present day, Markula (2014) uses Foucauldian discourse analysis to reveal themes in the representation of Yoga over time. Both articles discuss the formation of an idealised ‘Yoga body,’ the impact of commercialisation, and the similarities found between Yoga discourse and the agendas promoted within neoliberal exercise cultures of North America. These articles help to articulate the complex juxtaposition of ancient Yoga philosophies situated amongst contemporary, consumer societies. As Markula (2014) notes, while *Yoga Journal* covers promoted finding an authentic self as an alternative to consumer-driven ideals, the promotion of self-liberation is ironically delivered amongst a limited understanding of freedom through self-care and neoliberal governance:

the *Yoga Journal* covers advocated yoga as a tool for discovering one’s true, unchanging self lost in the frenzied consumerism. Such a focus could be seen as “liberating” the yogi from consumerist panoptic self-surveillance of her body shape. However, the yoga lifestyle was designed to maximize happiness through educated “self-care.” This type of yoga promotion reinforced the logic of the self-enterprising individual who was only “liberated” to freely take responsibility for following the neoliberal rationale of self-care. (Markula, 2014, p. 166)

There are many ways that individuals find paths towards freedom and while individualised notions of Yoga may help some, they may be limiting for others. As such, there is a need to broaden the range of voices and experiences around the practices of contemporary Yoga. Reflecting on Yoga publications, and as suggested by Markula (2014), there is opportunity for academics to prioritise difference in bodies. This could help to reveal the complexity of Yoga as experienced by a variety of contemporary practitioners.

In a recent article using by Humberstone and Cutler-Riddick (2015), findings gathered from a contextualised phenomenological approach reveals the experiences of women in aging bodies. They suggest that through practices of breathing, relaxation and reflection, older women are challenging the dualism of inner mind - outer body, shifting intentions for practice from body maintenance to body acceptance, and problematising stereotypes around what is possible in aging bodies. Humberstone and Cutler-Riddick's (2015) study stands out as it features a population of practitioners not typically included in Yoga research. As such, that there is a need for continued exploration into a wider range of participants that vary in age, body type, style of practice, ethnicity and cultural heritage.

As described above, the topic of Yoga has been analysed through various feminist approaches. Discourse analysis provides insight into the ways that media and associated imagery are influencing the lives of practitioners (Markula, 2014; Webb et al, 2017). Phenomenology reveals the subtleties of embodied experiences in Yoga for different populations (Humberstone & Cutler-Riddick, 2015; Leledaki, 2014). A whole range of both critical and intersectional feminist analyses have been published that reveal problematic tensions arising in contemporary Yoga communities (Berila, Klein & Roberts, 2016). These include discussions around Yoga and the neoliberal representation of health (Kauer, 2016), mainstream representations of Yoga as capitalist agendas that objectify the female body (Blaine, 2016), the lack of diversity in Yoga spaces (Velazquez, 2016) and the potential for more inclusivity in Yoga (Ballard & Kripalani, 2016). Below, I describe how some scholars in Aotearoa/New Zealand are investigating Yoga through autoethnographic and phenomenological approaches then consider ways that present understandings could expand through an engagement with ethnography and creative writing.

The majority of publications on Yoga come out of North America and Europe. This dominant body of literature could also benefit from diversification. In Aotearoa/New Zealand, recent publications focusing specifically on Yoga by Bailly (2014) and Tilley (2017) offer findings from very different research projects. Bailly (2014) works with autoethnography and phenomenology to explore embodied meanings of Yoga for six practitioners in her community of Ōtepoti/Dunedin. Tilley (2017) uses structured qualitative methods and statistical quantitative data to understand motivations and compilations of Yoga communities in Te Whanganui-a-Tara/Wellington. These projects provide very different insights into the socio-cultural issues that have influenced present understandings and practices of Yoga amongst their communities. Tilley (2017) discusses the particular development of Yoga in Aotearoa/New Zealand over time and offers insight into values driving community formation. Bailly (2014) notes similar findings to other qualitative works including: neoliberal governance/self-mastery, the search for an ultimate/authentic self through discipline and the impact of consumerism on the representation of Yoga bodies. Expanding on these works, this study considers how different social, political, environmental and material contexts are influencing lived experiences for women practitioners.

Conceptualising pathways towards articulating broadly defined, embodied experiences of Yoga, I was drawn to the work of Popovic (2012) and Bost (2016). These two authors offer examples of experimental writing styles that address theory and complex concepts through evocative uses of language. They helped me to rethink how I might be able to represent the lived experiences of women embodying Yoga while bringing together different writing styles and ways of knowing. In Popovic's (2012) autoethnographic writing on her experiences in a branded style of hot Yoga, she uses evocative poetry to draw readers into the intimate experience of moving through a Yoga *āsana* practice. In portions of the article, Popovic (2012) attributes personality to her body parts:

Spine resisted the twist. My pearly cord of life fought to remain rigid, refusing to bend after a long year of writing. He has quite an attitude problem, if I do say so myself. It's almost impossible to get him to arc backward, and the muscles supporting him are even more stubborn. Clenching, seizing, uniting. They prefer to send me a passive aggressive



“Screw off. Too bad. We’re not budging.” (p. 4)

Popovic’s (2012) article weaves together a range of theory through creative and unconventional academic writing. Her representation of body parts as knowing entities that are actively making decisions demonstrates how embodied experiences can include a variety of material formations that have agency. Through her article, she illustrates how the complexity of embodiment can be revealed through evocative writing. A discussion on the agency of materiality is expanded below in the feminist new materialisms section. Here, I extend to offer Bost’s (2016) article as a further example of feminist scholarship that disrupts dominant forms of both writing and knowledge acquisition to describe multi-faceted, embodied experiences in Yoga.

In Bost’s (2016) article on embodying feminisms while practicing Yoga, she weaves together theories of Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldúa with experimental writing styles to analyse her lived experiences “shape-shifting” (p. 191) in Yoga. The result is a mental, corporeal, cultural, spiritual, temporal, material entanglement that questions the range of formations contributing to Bost’s (2016) lived experiences:

*What if you experienced your body expanding to the size of the room . . . ?*

*The body must be more than the categories that mark you.*

I didn’t want to write about yoga, at first, because of its association with cultural appropriation, escapism, perfected bodies, and individualism. But the content of yoga undermines the promises sold by yoga boutiques. (pp. 192-193)

The work of both Popovic (2012) and Bost (2016) offer ways to conceptualise embodied experiences in ways that weave together evocative writing and complex theory. However, there remain no publications that inquire into the lived experiences of women practitioners who have dedicated their lives to embodying Yoga lifestyles. Beyond this, many publications are limited to a singular lineage of Yoga (Atkinson, 2017; Popovic, 2012). This present study expands to consider the lived experiences of practitioners from a variety of disciplines. Using a combination of theory, experience and evocative writing, I inquire into the ways that women are adopting Yoga lifestyles in different ages and stages of life. In the following section, I broaden out from the

literature on women's experiences in Yoga to consider research on women's lifestyles in physical cultures.

## **Women's lifestyles in moving bodies**

The concept of lifestyles is equally as broad as it is differentially defined throughout a long history of literature (Abel, 2008; Bourdieu, 1984; Cockerham, Rütten & Abel, 2011; Giddens, 1991; Tomlinson, 2003; Weber, 1978; Wheaton, 2010). A discussion on lifestyle could be incomplete without mention of the contributions of Pierre Bourdieu. His concepts (including field, capital and habitus), describe how lived experiences can be influenced by social positions, similar tastes, ideas around power relations, cultural capital and hierarchy as contributors influencing lifestyle choices that construct social spaces (Thorpe, Barbour & Bruce, 2011). Often descriptions of lifestyles centre around discussions of capital, class and power as they relate to decision making and consumption practices (Featherstone, 1987). As I mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, I understand lifestyles in Yoga to be representative of values that are influencing the decisions that practitioners are making throughout their daily lives.

Feminist researchers analysing various moving and sporting lifestyles are expanding the discussion surrounding lifestyles to consider the influence of a range of factors including gender, sexuality, access and privilege. Analysing the ways that women are making sense of their complex experiences in movement cultures reveals the ways that power formations are influencing choices (Birrell, 2000; Roy, 2013; Wheaton, 2010). In contemporary times, researching movement practices addresses issues that women face as they move amongst cultures impacted by neoliberalism and feminine ideals built through consumer cultures (Leledaki, 2014; Markula, 1995, 2014; Thorpe, Toffoletti & Bruce, 2017; Wheaton, 2000). There are many critical socio-cultural analyses of women's embodied experiences throughout a range of sporting and physical cultures (Larsson & Quennerstedt, 2012; Mansfield, 2011; Olive, 2015a; Pavlidis, 2012; Roy, 2013; Thorpe, 2012b; Wheaton, 2010). Below, I expand on Markula's (1995, 2004, 2014) articles as they cover multiple fitness regimes and include Yoga.

In her discourse analysis of *Yoga Journal* covers, Markula (2014) addresses the ways that dominant discursive formations around Yoga are similar to and differentiate from

those of other popular fitness cultures such as Pilates, dance and aerobics in North America. Beyond this, her body of literature analyses engagement in popular fitness trends and reveals the ways that groups of women are influenced by, participating amongst and, in some cases, resisting the normative patterns promoted within each uniquely defined physical culture (Markula, 1995, 2004). In her writing on Yoga (2014), she acknowledges the ways that Yoga publications repeat dominant discursive formations around ‘healthy’ bodies as lithe, lean and youthful. Women in Yoga are inundated by imagery of Yoga bodies in carefully crafted marketing for the sale of goods, and often, the representations of these bodies are similarly thin and youthful (Miller, 2016; Webb et al., 2017). For the purposes of this discussion I highlight that, while the shape and age of a ‘Yoga body’ in media imagery is influencing the women, there are other aspects of this broader lifestyle system that are also guiding choices in daily life.

Contemporary women practitioners are adjusting their lifestyle choices, not solely in the ways that they are shaping their bodies, but also in relation to how they are interacting with others and making consumptive choices that reflect Yoga’s ethical principles. As an ancient philosophical system with a designated set of ethical rules documented in early Yoga texts, Yoga differs from other contemporary physical lifestyle practices. For example, the *Yoga sūtras of Patañjali* list a number of ethical teachings that a Yoga practitioner should be observing in their daily life (see Appendix 3). This prompts curiosity around the ways that contemporary women are navigating teachings from ancient and contemporary sources. Further, noting which values are guiding the contemporary embodiment of Yoga in daily life demonstrates how Yoga is evolving to accommodate for contemporary lives.

Feminist scholars researching lifestyle practices in contemporary sporting communities similarly mention the impact of dominant discursive formations and analyse the ways that these ideals are lived through the choices women make throughout their daily lives (Olive, 2015b; Wheaton, 2000, 2010). Thorpe and Rinehart (2010) acknowledge how attempts at understanding the consumptive lifestyle practices of individuals wishing to demonstrate affiliation with movement cultures is a complex, slippery, and at times, emotional journey. As women both resist and conform with hegemonic formations of womanhood as represented in both contemporary society and in particular physical

cultures, they are faced with a variety of influences that may be guiding lifestyle choices.

Contemporary neoliberal and healthy lifestyle literature offer ways that researchers are working with women in moving bodies to understand the dominant discursive formations and associated pressures facing women today. Today's recommendations for living well often feature super women endlessly achieving remarkable feats with minimal stress (Gill & Orgad, 2018). The image of a neoliberal, feminist subject taking full control of her own life presents a challenging endeavour considering the power-laden systems within which gendered subjects are presently existing (Rottenberg, 2018). Contemporary research on women in movement practices addresses the multiple pressures facing women, and considers how they are navigating these conditions through their embodied experiences in movement.

In a recent publication by Barbour, Clark and Jeffrey (2019), embodied experiences shared with an intergenerational group of women through *Movement for Wellbeing* classes are analysed. They reveal that in shifting focus away from achievement and outcomes, the women participants were able to locate meaning in moving solely for movement's sake. They further found benefit in considering how engaging in movement outside of societal expectations could offer women moments of freedom from the pressures of daily life. Barbour, Clark and Jeffrey (2019) found that moving in ways not typically associated with the daily lives of women, this group could locate opportunities to disrupt and expand upon movement experiences typically associated with womanhood:

Women's relationship with the floor allowed them to access an expanded repertoire of movement experiences, being less bipedal and upright, and more grounded. This active engagement and creation of new movement experiences are similarly reflected in their re-imaginings of wellbeing, which may be seen to contrast dominant societal norms for women that require appropriate and carefully controlled feminine movement behaviour.  
(p. 9)

Barbour, Clark and Jeffrey (2019) suggest that through experimenting with new movement practices, this creativity and freedom of expression translated into their "re-

imaginings of wellbeing” (p. 9) throughout their daily life. The inclusion of working on or with the floor as an important feature of the women’s experiences expands the repertoire of sources that may be influencing women’s movement and lifestyle practices. As an embodied researcher inquiring into Yoga lifestyles, I am intrigued by the multiple components of daily life that are influencing the experiences of contemporary women practitioners. These formations are equally social, natural, cultural, and corporeal. Barbour, Clark and Jeffrey’s (2019) mention of the floor, Atkinson’s (2017) work with sweat, and Popovic’s (2012) poetry on body parts, contribute to a growing body of literature considering the ways that both human and non-human materiality are present and influencing lived experiences.

With an interest in uncovering a depth of knowledge through research, I recognise the potential that non-human materiality holds when attempting to expand understandings around embodied experiences in Yoga lifestyles. Being intrigued by the breadth of a lived experience, I was drawn to research that considers the agency and influence of matter. As such, this literature review turns to feminist new materialisms and academic publications that theorise the lived experiences of women beyond the confines of fleshy boundaries to contemplate an intricately interconnected existence that is in perpetual motion and inclusive of all materiality. Before offering an overview of feminist new materialisms and posthumanism, I present a rationale for its inclusion in this present work. Below, I describe how feminisms, embodiment and attempts at articulating extremely complex lived experiences have all inspired me to engage with contemporary posthuman theory.

## **Embodiment and Beyond**

In Chapter One, I described how I understand the term ‘embodiment’ in this research as a lived experience that is equally natural and social (Barbour, 2004). Feminist theorists are cumulatively influencing my thinking around embodiment as an interconnected experience being lived through a gendered body that is in perpetual motion (Barad, 2007; Barbour, 2004; Braidotti, 2013; Grosz, 1994). While previously, I offered a brief introduction to how I am conceptualising the term embodiment in this thesis, here, I present a more thorough overview of the range of embodiment literature that inspires this research.

Much feminist philosophy on embodiment draws inspiration from the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty (1961/1993). His description of embodiment suggests an inextricably linked interconnectivity between mind and body that challenges Cartesian notions of a split between a knowing mind and the unchanging material base of a body. Although the work of Merleau-Ponty has undeniably influenced contemporary writing on embodiment, his work positions experience through a gendered, male body and is therefore limited when researching women's experiences. Recent feminist scholars have expanded upon his work to consider gender differences in subjectivity and knowing (Barbour, 2004; Grosz, 1994; Sheets-Johnstone, 1999; Shildrick, 2015).

Over the past 30 years a corporeal turn, inspired by feminist scholars, considers the ways that theorising through gendered, moving bodies (embodied research) can challenge a previous somatophobia in academia. These feminist scholars consider the ways that the body might be instrumental in knowing and being (Barbour, 2004, 2018b; Grosz, 1994; Sheets-Johnstone, 1999). Today, feminist embodied researchers are considering how their sensory and lived experiences in moving bodies might provide them with differentiated information inaccessible through traditional means of knowledge acquisition (Allen-Collinson, 2009; Barbour, 2004, 2011; Borovica, 2017; Humberstone, 2013; Lea, 2008; Pink, 2008, 2015; Sheets-Johnstone, 1999; Throsby, 2013).

Feminist scholars researching through various methods are considering how embodiment comprises more than physical form. These researchers understand embodied experiences to be inextricably linked to the social, environmental and cultural contexts within which a body finds itself situated (Barbour, 2004; Humberstone & Cutler-Riddick, 2015). Allen-Collinson and Owton (2015) employ the term "intense embodiment" to "describe periods of heightened awareness of corporeal existence" (p. 247) that include political, historical and social aspects of bodily experiences. Drawing attention to the complex connections between bodies and environments broadens the concept of embodiment to consider multiple influences in any given situation (Barbour, 2004; Braidotti, 2003; Gatens, 1996/2013).

Moving away from the Cartesian duality of mind over body, embodiment research appreciates a broader range of experiences contributing to daily life that include the

sensory, felt, emotional, affective and corporeal as well as the social, cultural and intellectual. In Engel's (2008) research on dance, she mentions being interested in inquiring into the "aliveness" (p. 1) of a lived experience that is at the same time social and cultural, existential, cosmic and situational. Welcoming the body into a discussion around lived experience is not only enabling a broader description of life, it can also indicate a political statement around the importance of including the presence of women's bodies in academic publications (Throsby, 2013).

For years, women's bodies have been subject to degradation, considered objects, 'other' than male, and undervalued for their contributions to knowledge and knowing (Grosz, 1994; Young, 1979). This objectification was described earlier in this chapter in a discussion of ancient Yoga. The decision to place women's leaky, sensual, imperfect bodies in knowledgeable positions of power within this research space is a conscious decision. In this project, I am attempting to unravel knowledge hierarchies and find relevance in the literature on embodied ways of knowing that enable me to situate women's Yoga bodies at the forefront of discussions on contemporary Yoga knowledge (Barbour, 2004, 2018b, 2019). Additionally, the decision to work through bodies was deemed necessary as it allows this research to reveal the nuances of non-duality as experienced while embodying Yoga.

In academic research, embodiment is referenced widely and used differently depending on the project and the philosophies of the researcher. While some reference the word embodiment in terms of representation, others use the term to indicate a state of being and interacting within the world (Csordas, 1990, 1994). Exploring embodiment as a process of moving amongst the world and making meaning through a body, feminist scholars are considering the ways that a body adds complexity to understandings of women's lived experiences (Allen-Collinson, 2009; Barbour, 2004, 2011, 2019; Humberstone, 2013; Markula, 2019; McIlwain & Sutton, 2014). Embodied ways of knowing and embodied ethnographic research are described in more detail in the methodology chapter of this thesis. Below, I analyse articles by Barbour (2004, 2018b) as inspiration for this embodied research.

Barbour (2004) describes "a number of problematic dualisms that are central to Western knowledge, such as the separation between mind and body and between knowledge and

experience” (p.227). Through her article she illustrates how a fear that surrounds the body can be addressed through an appreciation of embodiment. Further, she presents embodied ways of knowing as strategies that women are using to understand the complexity of their lived experiences. Barbour’s (2004) conceptualisation of embodiment includes “a person’s biological (somatic), intellectual, emotional, bodily, social, gendered, artistic and spiritual experience, within their cultural and geographical location” (p. 230). Barbour’s definition of embodiment includes multiple elements that are all contributing to women’s lived experiences, her definition moves inquiry beyond the rational mind and inspires me to consider the many influences present in any given moment.

Barbour (2018b) revisits feminist epistemologies to articulate how early feminist critiques of Western dualisms built a foundation that inspired scholarship on lived bodies in sport, leisure and physical cultures. Below, Barbour (2018b) reflects on the continued tensions she notices as a dance scholar who is embodying alternative ways of knowing in an academic setting and states that:

For an individual woman using an embodied knowledge strategy, living with alternative understandings to dominant knowledge will likely create challenges and tensions that she will have to resolve throughout her life. Resolutions will not come only through rationalization or intuition, but through embodying and living out the possibilities. In living out the possibilities, she will necessarily come to discard knowledge that is not liveable. (p. 221)

Embodiment, as understood and applied in this research setting, is how I view my involvement as a woman who is learning through a lived body that is intricately connected to the research process. As an embodied researcher and similar to Barbour (2018b), I recognise the tensions of immersing myself in a world that values Western modes of knowledge production and struggle to articulate my learning through this process.

In Humberstone’s (2013) article, she examines how the body comes to know through its connection to environment. She pays particular attention to physical and sensual



engagement with space in adventurous outdoor activities and observes how a nexus of experiences (as both social and natural) can facilitate experiences of oneness with the environment. In her findings she describes how these interconnected experiences can inspire both empathy and action. Understanding interconnectivity and associated behaviour change is something that Barad (2007) similarly writes about and will be discussed throughout this thesis. Here, I describe Humberstone's (2013) research to highlight the final point she makes in her article. While describing a variety of complex embodied and spiritual accounts, she acknowledges the "paradox of (re)-presenting these sensorial experiences" (p. 570). She contemplates whether these moments can be shared and/or understood by individuals who do not have experience in similar movement practices.

In this thesis on Yoga lifestyles I struggle with similar tensions. Grappling with the challenge of languaging expansive lived experiences inspired me to read widely throughout feminist scholarship. In searching for ways to articulate the unique and complex experiences the women of this study were embodying, I continually found myself returning to new materialisms and posthumanism. Admittedly, there is a debate that arises when using posthuman theory to analyse empirical material arising out of embodied and intimately human, qualitative methodologies. I address this discussion and describe my philosophical stance in the methodology chapter. Below, I discuss the particular theorists that have greatly influenced my understandings around lived experiences in Yoga as expansive and interconnected. In this way, I suggest how a feminist ethnographic inquiry on women's embodied experiences of Yoga can draw upon the theoretical lenses of new materialisms and posthumanism to broaden understandings of contemporary Yoga lifestyles.

## **Feminist new materialisms**

Academic scholars writing on interconnected lived experiences are not solely contained within feminist new materialisms. Scholars researching through various disciplines including psychology (Adams, 2018; Braud, 2001), geography (Bondi, 2005; Massey, 2005), phenomenology (Allen-Collinson & Owton, 2015; McCormack, 2017), gender studies (Bennett, Cheah, Orlie & Grosz, 2010; Grosz, 1994), education (Pillow, 2015a; Radford & Roth, 2011) and existential philosophy (Braidotti, 2011, 2013; Wilber, 1997)

are broadening previously conceived and Western notions of existence as human-centred, mind-dominant and/or defined by the boundaries of individualised bodies.

As described throughout the previous section on embodiment, the Cartesian duality of mind governing an inert body is being broken down through research that considers lived experiences as physical, social, cultural, affective, environmental, intellectual and gendered (Barbour, 2004). Research on interconnectivity and intercorporeality presents lived experiences as intricately connected and contributing to the worlds within which they are moving. While there are many similarities throughout these bodies of literature, I highlight concepts from feminist new materialisms to consider the ways that these researchers are engaging with matter in research settings.

Feminist new materialisms relate past theories and future imaginings to rethink the ways that material bodies are intra-acting in worlds (Van der Tuin, 2011). They suggest that understandings around women's lived experiences can be broadened to include a consideration of the ways that multiple formations, that are at the same time material and discursive, are contributing to a continual process of becoming (Warin, 2015).

A consideration of materiality, interconnectivity and a mutually implicated existence in perpetual motion are features of research claiming the term 'new materialisms.' While many of the theories in new materialisms offer interesting concepts for academic research, the 'newness' of this approach has been contested (Ahmed, 2008; Barad, 2014; Fullagar, 2020; Van der Tuin, 2014). In particular, post-structural feminists argue that breaking down ideas around human liberal subjectivity to reveal ways that lives are intricately intertwined does not present 'new' opportunities for inquiry. However, as Bronwyn Davies (2018) suggests below, there is possibility for theories (like Barad's agential realism) to extend upon and work with feminist scholarship from previous eras:

Barad offers new concepts and new ways of thinking-doing our research, which do not run against poststructuralist philosophy, but with it, at the same time bringing new emphases and new priorities. Her primary intervention is the introduction of Bohr's physics/philosophy, with which she severs the Cartesian and Newtonian elements of our thinking that have unwittingly carried over into the present. (p. 125)

Davies (2018) and Markula (2019) both acknowledge that the presence of matter in research processes and in discussions on findings offer ways that new materialisms differ from previous socio-cultural analyses. They suggest that this inclusion of matter alongside socio-cultural analyses can extend upon other feminist models of inquiry in research settings.

While contemplating connection, I prioritise subjectivity to consider how lived experiences can be simultaneously intra-acting and individualised. This is an important consideration that addresses valuable critiques of new materialisms in feminist research. In Ahmed's (2008) critique she suggests that theories of new materialisms potentially de-centre human individuality and de-politicise the body. She warns against a style of research that could trivialise the importance of difference in contemporary societies that remain subjected to oppression on multiple levels. In this thesis, similar to Hinton and Liu (2015), I am aware of the capacity for feminist new materialisms to perpetuate universalising, homogenising rhetoric and work from within these tensions to prioritise both difference and individuality.

Throughout their recent article, Hinton and Van der Tuin (2014) discuss ways that new materialisms can remain both political and ethical. They suggest that, to claim the term 'feminist new materialisms' in research requires methodological approaches that take into consideration the "oppressive structures that stay, in spite of, or as part of ontologies of virtual pasts, living presents and leaps into the future" (Hinton & Van der Tuin, 2014, p. 9). Considering difference at the intersections of race, sex, gender, culture, disability and class whilst simultaneously contemplating an interconnected materiality of existence presents a unique challenge in a research setting.

Below, I present literature that engages with theories from feminist new materialisms alongside moving bodies. The range of academics engaging with feminist new materialisms is vast. Therefore, I offer two particular theorists, and associated research applying their concepts, to represent ways that it might be possible to articulate women's interconnected experiences in contemporary Yoga lifestyles. Karen Barad's theory of agential realism and Rosi Braidotti's writing on posthumanism are offered in designated sections below with examples of work from contemporary feminist scholars engaging with their complex theories as they rethink women's lived experiences in

moving bodies.

### ***Barad and agential realism***

Over the past decade, the application of Barad's theory of agential realism (and associated concepts) has steadily increased in popularity throughout a range of feminist scholarship (Coffey, 2019; Fullagar, 2017; Markula, 2019; Thomson & Davies, 2019). Her theory of agential realism connects complex quantum physics and a breadth of social theory through exquisitely verbose language. Her suggested entanglement of existence challenges binary distinctions (for example, natural and cultural, material and discursive) and has intrigued feminist scholars from a number of disciplines to build research questioning through the lens of her concepts (Braidotti, 2018; St. Pierre, Jackson & Mazzei, 2016), including those interested in the moving body (Clark & Thorpe, 2019; Fullagar, 2020; Fullagar & Pavlidis, 2018).

Barad's (2007) theory of agential realism suggests that the phenomena of the world arises through a process of intra-action. She describes these intra-actions as mutually implicated interactions or entanglements and suggests an inherent agency and inseparability that applies to all materiality, both human and non-human (Barad, 2003). In agential realism, Barad suggests that all materiality actively contributes to a continual becoming that is intra-acting. Below, Barad (2007) describes this theory as something that pushes beyond binary and/or potentially limiting distinctions within research settings:

Agential Realism is an epistemological and ontological framework that cuts across many of the well-worn oppositions that circulate in traditional realism versus constructivism, agency versus structure, idealism versus materialism and poststructuralism versus Marxism debates. In its reformulation of agency and its analysis of the productive, constraining, and exclusionary nature of naturalcultural practices, including their crucial role in the materialization of all bodies, agential realism goes beyond performativity theories that focus exclusively on the human/social realm. (p. 225)

Barad's agential realism extends beyond disrupting binary distinctions to consider an entanglement of all materiality. She describes her theory as an ethico-onto-epistemological stance, a conceptual shift that presents phenomena as "the inseparability/entanglement of intra-acting agencies" (p. 139). Further, she suggests that "it is through specific agential intra-actions that the boundaries and properties of the components of phenomena become determinate and that particular concepts...become meaningful" (Barad, 2007, p. 139).

Today, many scholars are embracing Barad's theory of agential realism and engaging with some of her key concepts developed through this theory including: entanglement (Baxter, 2020; Fullagar, 2020; Morley, 2018), intra-action (Colls, 2007; Thiel, 2015), apparatus (Huddleston, 2016; Schadler, 2019), agential cuts (Corlett & Williams, 2016; Warfield, 2016), the material-discursive (Hultin & Mähring, 2017; Ringrose & Rawlings, 2015) and diffraction (Clark & Thorpe, 2019; Van der Tuin, 2014). Though there are many concepts arising out of Barad's agential realism that have prompted feminist inquiry, below, I offer details on two studies that work with concepts from agential realism in unique ways.

Both Baxter (2020) and Fullagar (2020) offer two different approaches to working with Barad's concepts to present lived experiences as intra-acting becomings that are influenced by both human and non-human materiality. Each article addresses a range of topics for discussion through unique styles of engagement that are both theoretical and creative. Fullagar (2020) uses diffractive analysis to complicate understandings around women's experiences of depression and recovery. She considers how their participation in physical cultures is entangled amongst the complexity of their lived experiences. Baxter (2020) uses a different approach and centres the boxing glove as the object through which she articulates her ethnographic findings. She works through the materiality of gloves to consider the entanglement of bodies, objects and discourse through the material presence of, and women's engagement with, gloves in boxing gyms.

Fullagar (2020) addresses the discursive formations that surround depression, recovery and physical cultures. She considers how "new materialist feminist politics seeks to unsettle, or diffract, the ontological assumptions informing biological, psychological

and sociological knowledge about recovery as it is entangled with depression as a gendered phenomenon” (p. 4). Fullagar (2020) uses evocative writing samples from women to represent complex entanglements of theory and experience. Using diffractive methods of analysis and creative writing techniques, she is “positioning agency as distributed and profoundly co-implicated in relational ontologies, multiple forces and complex affects” (p. 26). In rethinking women’s experiences of depression she is able to challenge reductionist ideas around ‘solving’ depression to consider more broadly defined understandings around attempts at becoming well. These findings are made possible through the entanglement she builds alongside theories from feminist new materialisms, the women’s embodied experiences and evocative writing.

Where Fullagar (2020) uses diffractive analysis to understand women’s experiences in depression. Baxter’s (2020) article unravels the distinctions of subject-object-body to inquire into the materiality of boxing gloves. She considers the ways that women’s bodies are working in and through objects to build embodied relationships and meanings through things. Questioning how gloves have agency in their worlds, she offers evocative reflections that situate gloves as the central objects of research. Her research process continually unravels the notion that subjects (women’s bodies) and objects (boxing gloves) are separate. She considers their mutual implication to be indicative of (what Barad would call) an intra-action. In her article, she moves from considering one as separate from the other and instead theorises how women’s bodies and gloves exist in an entangled relationship with one another.

Through gloves, as the material representation of an ontological entanglement, Baxter’s (2020) article contemplates the agency of non-human materiality, the ways that women are experiencing their own corporeality, and the unique formations of power that are all present and contributing within the particular environment of a boxing gym. Through her article she highlights the ways that women’s bodies sweat, bleed and break from traditional notions of womanhood to build new understandings of women’s experiences in sporting environments. Baxter (2020) suggests that:

Using a new materialist framework to diffractively research the body allows for the corporeal to make a return to the forefront of social science research. In order to reach beneath the skin of how women’s bodies are

lived, we must transcend traditional materialist analysis and recognize the material-discursive formations that form our ontological everyday. (p. 166)

In the pages that follow, I continue this discussion on the influence of non-human materiality in lived experiences and turn to Rosi Braidotti's scholarship on posthumanism. However, before moving into a section on Braidotti, it is important to differentiate between the work of Barad and Braidotti as they contain many similarities.

While there are marked similarities between Barad's (2007) theory of agential realism and Braidotti's (2013) writing on posthumanism, there are also distinct differences that deserve clarification. The concept of posthumanism could be compared to Barad's (2007) agential realism as a continual becoming. Both concepts consider multiple influences that are both human and non-human, as contributing to an existence in perpetual motion. The difference between these two concepts lies in the priority that the women place on agency versus knowledge.

Barad's entanglement is always connected to the agency and self-determinacy of matter. Braidotti's posthumanism is more concerned with expanding understandings of knowledge sources to include all material formations. Both women, after gaining an understanding of human lives as mutually implicated in the continual becoming of all materiality, prioritise ethics and acknowledge the importance of considering consequences prior to taking action. This consideration of ethics is discussed further in Chapters Three and Six. Below, I expand on Braidotti's posthumanism alongside work that engages with her writing.

### ***Braidotti and posthumanism***

Rosi Braidotti (2006, 2011, 2013, 2015, 2016, 2017) has published extensively on the topic of posthumanism, although she is not the only academic scholar publishing on the topic. The range of literature labelled as 'posthumanism' working with 'posthuman' knowing subjects are all subtly distinct in process, field and topic of inquiry (Mazzei, 2018; Renold & Ringrose, 2017; Toffoletti, 2007). Much of Braidotti's (2013, 2018) writing centres around a posthuman knowing subject as a generative entity that is informed by past and present power formations as both human and non-human materiality.

For this present study, I draw upon Braidotti's (2013) understanding of bodies in posthumanism and consider posthuman knowing subjects as active, embedded, embodied formations contributing to a generative life. Her growing body of research questions assumptions around humans as normative conventions and suggests a move to considering a more broadly defined understanding of "a complex and relational subject framed by embodiment, sexuality, affectivity, empathy and desire as core qualities" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 26). Braidotti (2018) insists that the upsurge of interest in posthuman scholarship indicates an increased curiosity and ingenuity around what constitutes a posthuman knowing subject. Arising out of a history of critical engagement, I understand Braidotti's (2018) posthuman to be a multi-faceted, knowing subject that is embedded in society, generatively becoming, and contributing through informed, ethical acts as performed throughout daily life.

Posthumanism does not cast away the importance of the individual, rather, it promotes a new way to think about what it means to be a multi-layered entity arising through human form. The term posthumanism may dissuade scholars working through embodied methodologies as the word itself may suggest a move away from considering the value of the body. However, in my reading of Braidotti (2018), I understand that she offers valuable insights into a posthuman knowing subject that can be understood as "relational, embodied and embedded, affective and accountable" (p. 1). This description makes space to explore women's lived experiences amongst theories of posthumanism.

Below I offer an analysis of feminist research that engages with the work of Braidotti. Though numerous articles reference Braidotti and posthumanism, very few attempt to bring her theories into a dialogue with the embodied experiences of practitioners. Colls' (2012) article recommends that feminist geographers consider adopting a "nomadic consciousness" (p. 430) that can equally be critical of gender-blindness while considering bodily corporeality more broadly. She weaves together feminist geographies, sexual difference theories, and non-representational geographies to find spaces where generative relationships between theories and experiences can be built. She recognises the importance of drawing connections between bodies of knowledge and ways of conceptualising existence that allow for productive and innovative ways to think about the world and women's lived experiences within it. Colls (2012) description of a generative knowledge that includes a wide range of sources that are at the same



time human and non-human, theoretical and lived, influences this research.

The final research I analyse in this literature review is Buckingham's (2017) article on designing a potential framework for research that combines Guattari's 'ecosophy,' Braidotti's 'nomadic theory' and Yoga philosophy. In her article, Buckingham draws upon her previous ethnographic work embodying Yoga alongside women participants in studio-based classes (Buckingham & Degen, 2012). She considers how Braidotti's nomadic theory can be used to guide a feminist interpretation of Guattari's ecosophy<sup>10</sup> and considers how these theories can be brought to life through the ethical and embodied practices of Yoga.

In her discussion, she reflects on the intersections of embodying Yoga and the work of Braidotti to consider how these can impact both her process and presence in research settings and in daily life. She mentions the ethical and philosophical practices of the *Yoga sūtras of Patañjali* and considers how embodying these teachings alongside feminist theories of non-duality can bring the researcher towards recognising a common consciousness. Similar to Humberstone's (2013) observations on how experiences of oneness with nature in adventure sports can increase empathy, Buckingham (2017) suggests that an increasing awareness of connection through practices of Yoga can encourage a consideration of ethical action.

Buckingham's (2017) article is theoretical and as such, she cautions that her discussion is provisional. However, she is inspired by this potentially enriching theoretical dialogue and considers how daily ethical acts might contribute to change over time. Importantly, Buckingham's (2017) article uses posthuman theory to analyse qualitative and embodied feminist ethnographic findings from a previous study. Her analysis is completed upon returning to her empirical material gathered during a study with her colleague Monica Degen (Buckingham & Degen, 2012). This is a crucial point that I will return to in my methodology chapter: there is relevance in using a posthuman lens to analyse findings from embodied feminist ethnographic research to help articulate transcendent and daily interconnected experiences in Yoga. My work on women's Yoga lifestyles extends Buckingham's (2017) reflections bringing these conceptual

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<sup>10</sup> "Felix Guattari's 'ecosophy'...is an 'ethico-political articulation...between three ecological registers [of] the environment, social relations and human subjectivity'" (Buckingham, 2017, p. 144).

frameworks to life within an embodied ethnographic study. In summary, I overview the range of literature covered throughout this chapter, draw upon themes and present ways that this ethnography is both inspired by and expanding upon current understandings.

## **Summary**

As mentioned in Chapter One, this project considers how research can mirror life in a continual becoming that is complex, messy and in motion. The breadth of work presented throughout this literature review is building a cumulative understanding of ways that women's Yoga lifestyles are being conceptualised in contemporary and historical publications. From ancient Yoga texts revealing four lifestyle pathways, through to intervention studies that use the term 'Yoga lifestyle,' to considering ways that feminist academics are researching women's experiences in Yoga, a narrative is being continually rebuilt around ways that research can inquire into women's embodiment of Yoga.

As demonstrated in this chapter, there remains opportunity for research that features women's embodied experiences in contemporary Yoga lifestyles. An interest in Yoga lifestyles inspired an immersion into the literature that inquires into women's contemporary lifestyles in movement practices. This range of feminist scholarship is building conceptual frameworks to deconstruct mind-body distinctions and consider the multiplicity of influences that women are navigating as they embody movement practices in daily life. Taking an interest in finding depth and breadth through research has expanded inquiry to consider how lifestyles are impacted by both human and non-human forces.

My research draws upon multiple sources to build an entangled research process that extends upon previous literature. Bringing contemporary theories from feminist academics into a dialogue with women's experiences embodying Yoga, I am attempting to broaden previously conceived notions around what constitutes Yoga lifestyle practices for contemporary women. Throughout this thesis, I also experiment with representation and weave pieces of evocative writing throughout discussions that are both theoretically and experientially informed.

In the chapter that follows, I overview the methodological process of this research. Locating myself alongside experienced women Yoga practitioners, embodying philosophies of ancient Yoga teachings, and using feminist methods of inquiry, I design an entangled research project that facilitates both complexity and creativity. This consideration of theory, experience, method and ethics as processes that are contributing to a continual becoming fills the contents of the coming pages.

## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

### **An entangled ethnography**

This chapter offers a description of the unique methodological structure I designed for researching women's contemporary Yoga lifestyles. It illustrates how embodied Yoga philosophies of contemporary practitioners can work alongside complex feminist theory to broaden understandings of lived experience. Focused on unique lived experiences, this study is not intended to be replicable. This research is presented as processes of continual becoming, entanglements of feminist theory and women's embodied experiences that are perpetually intra-acting and fostering new understandings. I aim to reveal how this messy, multi-faceted project produced deep insights over time and alongside various sources of knowledge.

My use of the term 'entangled ethnography' references Karen Barad's (2007) concept of entanglement and indicates both mutual implication and motion in this research process. Considering my agency as a phenomena intra-acting with this research, I acknowledge my part in building and applying this methodological approach. The process of this research is articulated throughout this chapter alongside personal reflections drawn from my research journal. Continually reflecting, remaining as vulnerable as possible, and allowing the women to reveal their knowledge offered moments of excitement and bewilderment. Feeling lost and found, frustrated and elated, the journey of this research mirrors experiences in life as non-linear processes towards new understandings. The methodological process described herein does not offer an easy path to gathering empirical material and learning about Yoga lifestyles. Throughout this study, I often questioned both my process and myself. In hindsight, I can see how this research design enabled trusting relationships, deep connections and rich insights into the multi-faceted, nuanced experiences of women embodying contemporary Yoga lifestyles.

The first half of this chapter presents the theoretical frameworks and my methodology that provide the basis for this project. I provide my rationale for choice of paradigm and theory, then offer a description of the entangled ethnography I designed for this research. After locating a range of feminist-yogic entanglements that are guiding this ethnography, I present specific entanglements of ontology, epistemology and ethics. In the second

half of this chapter, I describe methods and processes while employing a multi-method approach that dialogues between both feminist and yogic principles. I introduce the women practitioners, discuss my unique adaptation of methods and highlight ethical considerations that arose through this ethnography on contemporary Yoga lifestyles.

## **Paradigmatic approaches**

Throughout this section I offer an overview of the various ways that scholars are working with and through paradigmatic approaches to gain complex understandings of women's lived experiences. Acknowledging the discussions that surround paradigms and the use of theory in qualitative research provides the opportunity to uncover extremely varied processes of inquiry. Through these unique approaches, feminist scholars are given the opportunity to locate new pathways towards uncovering nuanced understandings of women's lives. To begin, I offer a definition of paradigms by Markula and Silk (2011):

Paradigms are important because they provide the boundaries for the researchers ethics and values, actions in the social world, the control of the study (who initiates the work and asks questions), the voices deployed in the accounts of the research, and, indeed, the very basic and fundamental understanding of the world the researcher is investigating. (p. 25)

Many scholars, like Markula and Silk (2011), consider paradigms to be indicative of worldviews that remain consistent throughout the entire research process. Each paradigmatic approach guides choices as they relate to ontology, epistemology, theoretical frameworks, methodologies and methods. In this ethnography, my aim was to delve deeply into complex embodied experiences alongside the women of this study. As such, I decided to situate this work within an interpretive/critical feminist paradigm. The interpretive/critical paradigm allows for multiple realities and inquiry into the varied lived experiences of individuals (Crotty, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Markula & Silk, 2011). Being and moving through lived experiences simultaneously molds and forms understandings in an interpretive/critical paradigm, therefore, it is well suited to an embodied and feminist ethnography (Crotty, 1998; Heron & Reason, 2008; Scotland, 2012).

There are many potentials for innovative analysis in an interpretive/critical paradigm, particularly as a feminist scholar interested in understanding multi-faceted, embodied experiences. Situating this feminist embodied research in an interpretive/critical paradigm indicates my desire to entangle myself amongst the process of inquiry to uncover different ways of articulating the complexity of lived experiences for contemporary women. A feminist and embodied ethnography encourages the researcher to engage with theorists that facilitate thinking about the gendered body and its entanglement with the world differently (Barbour, 2018; Baxter, 2020; Beal, 2018). As such, this present research draws upon publications by contemporary feminist theorists to uncover a depth and breadth of embodied experience that is inclusive of both human and non-human materiality. This move to consider a lived experience beyond the confines of the body was inspired by my immersion in this ethnography and my interactions with the women of this study.

Some feminist scholars, such as St. Pierre (2014, 2019), argue that in order to work with the theories of new materialisms and posthumanism then the process of inquiry must begin with these theories (St. Pierre, 2014). Others, like Markula and Silk (2011), suggest that situating research within a broadly humanist paradigm then engaging with posthuman theory demonstrates paradigmatic inconsistency. However, many more feminist scholars (myself included) are finding value engaging with new materialist and posthuman theory as philosophies that can help to articulate complex lived experiences differently (Birmingham, 2017; Fullagar, 2020; Lather, 2006; Van der Tuin, 2011). Importantly, the discussion surrounding how and when it is appropriate to engage with new materialisms and posthuman theory finds no resolution. The paradigmatic approaches and research processes scholars are using to grapple with tensions that arise out of human and non-human philosophy vary greatly. This differentiation allows for a breadth of qualitative research that continues to expand our understandings of women's lived experiences.

In this present research, I am working as a feminist ethnographer within an interpretive/critical paradigm. My decision to situate this work within a broadly humanist methodology whilst engaging in posthuman theory indicates my philosophical stance that the human experience is inclusive of all materiality (this is further discussed in the ontology section of this chapter). Engaging in feminist theories that expand

understandings of lived experience to contemplate the possibility of an interconnected human and non-human, material and discursive existence has enabled this project to expand in response to the findings arising through this process of inquiry. This research continues the feminist tradition of expanding understandings of women's lived experiences through methods of inquiry that allow for disorder and discomfort (as well as order and joy) to influence the research processes (MacLure, 2013a, 2013b).

### ***Improvisational qualitative inquiry***

A qualitative approach indicates my desire to gain nuanced understandings of varied Yoga lifestyles as lived by different women. Though the range of qualitative research methods is vast, researchers in this field are similarly interested in the complexity of life and the multiple meanings that may arise out of any given situation (Smith & Caddick, 2012). Questions of ontology (the nature of being) and epistemology (the relation between the knower and the known) underpin all decisions made throughout the research process (Markula & Silk, 2011). My ontological stance and beliefs around epistemology as a feminist academic and as a dedicated Yoga practitioner consistently inspired my decisions in this research, this is described in detail below.

There are many ways that my research design and process do not comfortably sit within the confines of academic structures, including my focus on embodiment and my interest in entanglement. As such, I acknowledge the ways that I am extending beyond what might be considered 'traditional' in qualitative research and relate to Barbary and Boles' (2014) definition of an "improvisational humanist qualitative inquiry" (p. 401) where creative and traditional methods are brought to life through research in ways that present further ontological and epistemological opportunities. Like St. Pierre (2014), I struggle to resolve tensions when attempting to apply humanist methodology to a project questioning understandings around what it means to be human. Continually questioning, drawing inspiration from the women of this study, and working with contemporary feminist theories resulted in a messy and complex process of interpretive, critical and expansive research.

Importantly, this expansive interpretive/critical feminist methodological design is not comfortable, nor is it linear. Rather, it supports the chaos that mirrors life itself. Allowing this research to exist as a process of continual growth and supported by an

ongoing curiosity, new information may inspire new becomings. As mentioned previously, there are no ultimate truths offered through this research, only an acknowledgement that everything described throughout these pages is in a continual state of flux. This writing and the methodology of this study reflect a moment in time that is built upon Yoga lifestyles as multiple understandings towards unknown becomings.

## **Ethnography**

The term ‘ethnography’ refers to a long process of inquiry that requires “participation, observation and engagement over time with a community in everyday activities” (Barbour, 2019, p. 4). Ethnography is a qualitative approach to research. The roots of ethnographic methodology may have come from anthropology, but it has been adapted and adopted by academics interested in immersing themselves amongst a range of contemporary cultural settings (Baxter, 2020; Markula, 2004; Pink, 2015; Throsby, 2013). This is of particular relevance for my research, considering the Yoga community as a growing contemporary culture influencing an increasing population of practitioners.

As mentioned by Young and Atkinson (2012), an ethnographic study encourages the researcher to immerse themselves in a community to gain rich understandings of ways of living in the world. As an experienced Yoga practitioner and longstanding teacher in the region, ethnography was a natural choice as I am already immersed in the community. Beyond this, an ethnography supports my desire to learn about the women’s lived experiences in Yoga to great depth through the use of multiple methods over a longer period of time (Denzin, 1997). Observations, interviews, audio and video recordings, visual and digital methods are all options in this style of research (Olive & Thorpe, 2018). In my ethnography, I engage with a number of methods, and many touch points, over 14 months of research. This has enabled me to gather a great breadth of information around women’s lived experiences in contemporary Yoga.

### ***Feminist ethnography***

While the approach to research in a feminist ethnography can appear similar to other ethnographic work (long-term immersion in a culture) and methods used (interviews, journals, observations, focus groups), there are unique differences that point to the



ontological and epistemological assumptions of feminist researchers in this style of inquiry (Barbour, 2019; Beal, 2018; Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007). As mentioned in the literature review section of this thesis, feminist research investigates the unique formations of power that are influencing the daily lives of gendered bodies (Markula, 2003). In a feminist ethnography, researchers additionally consider how formations of power may be influencing any given situation inside the research setting and within a specified cultural group (Buch & Staller, 2007). Moving amongst a cultural group and considering power formations, feminist ethnographers prioritise reflexivity and ethics to ensure the project is developed and applied with care (Hesse-Biber, 2007).

In addition, framing this research as a feminist ethnography indicates my interest in expanding understandings of lived experiences. By making space for a variety of voices in this project I aim to widen the discussion that surrounds Yoga lifestyles (Reinharz & Davidman, 1992). Similar to other feminist ethnographers, I consider the demographics of participants chosen and how particular methods are being used to make space for all voices to be heard (Hesse-Biber, 2007). Methods that are typical to ethnographic study, like interviewing, are altered in a feminist ethnography to prioritise various aspects of care whilst respecting multiple ways of knowing. For example, through the process of in-depth interviewing, feminist ethnographers consider language choices, exercise advanced listening skills, and pay attention to non-verbal communication, observing moments of silence and considering the body as a site of knowing (Barbour, 2019; Hesse-Biber, 2007; Roulston, 2010).

Reflexivity and ethics remain important and continual processes that influence the work of feminist ethnographers (Beal, 2018; Ellis, 2017). Reflecting on personal motivations, assumptions, actions and reactions throughout the research process helps feminist ethnographers acknowledge biases. It further enables feminist academics to consider how moments of discomfort in research can lead to increased awareness around power formations that may cause awkward situations in specific cultural environments (Olive & Thorpe, 2011). All of the aforementioned practices in feminist ethnographic research were considered with care throughout this present research. Below, I briefly overview how embodied feminist ethnographies in movement cultures are approaching this methodology.

### ***Feminist embodied ethnographies***

Feminist ethnographers interested in the moving body are immersing themselves in various physical, sporting, leisure and/or movement cultures to learn about the lived experiences of gendered bodies (Barbour, 2019; Olive, McQuaig & Phillips, 2015). Critical socio-cultural analyses of these projects address the discursive formations that create norms in particular movement cultures and in turn, influence the bodily practices of women moving in these environments (Markula, 2004, 2014). All of these considerations have great implications when thinking about researching women's Yoga lifestyles as mind-body practices that are increasingly being commercialised and essentialised in societies that are eager to adopt and adapt practices in contemporary times (Berila, 2016).

Through considering the corporeality of lived experiences in socio-cultural analyses, feminist ethnographers are accessing more broadly defined understandings of movement cultures and the range of elements that are at the same time physical and cultural. In these projects, academics are considering the knowledge of the body as an active component in the research setting (Barbour, 2004, 2011, 2017). Francombe (2013) writes, "in placing—or rather articulating—the body purposefully within our research, I suggest we can forward method(ological) innovations in qualitative inquiries that expand and redefine the boundaries of knowledge production" (p. 258).

Feminist embodied ethnographies consider the sensuous corporeality of the moving body to be a site for knowledge acquisition and include this in their methodological considerations (Allen-Collinson, 2009; Barbour, 2004, 2018b; Humberstone, 2013). Beyond this, an embodied ethnography often features the researcher as an active participant in the movement practices being studied. In this style of research, the body of the academic scholar becomes an influential component in the process of inquiry (Pavlidis & Olive, 2014). An embodied ethnography prioritises the researcher's bodily experiences alongside other bodies throughout the research process (Francombe-Webb, Rich & De Pian, 2014). In these studies, the women's corporeal, emotional, natural and material experiences are considered as equally valuable to those that are political, social and cultural.

In this research, I extend upon feminist embodied ethnographies in movement cultures to consider how feminist principles can work in dialogue with the philosophical and ethical teachings of Yoga. Below, I describe my process of designing an entangled ethnography. Acknowledging the influence of multiple sources of knowledge that are at the same time embodied and intellectual, ancient and contemporary, academic and popular, human and non-human, material and discursive, I present a research process that considers the cumulative experiences of knowing and being in Yoga and in feminist ethnographic inquiry.

## **Designing an entangled ethnography**

In an effort to place value on the embodied knowledge of women Yoga practitioners, I build this work around multiple knowledge sources that include Yoga philosophy and feminist theory. Through this entanglement, I challenge the notion that Western theory is the only lens through which empirical material can be analysed. Similar to Barret (2015), Bost (2016) and Kaufmann (2017), I consider how knowledges from different communities can inform more broadly defined understandings of lived experiences. Within this research, I prioritise the entanglement of embodied, material, ancient and contemporary sources in attempts at building a deeper understanding of contemporary Yoga lifestyles.

Navigating conceptually complex theory, expansive embodied experiences, and a wealth of insights (gathered through a lengthy ethnography), proved challenging. Similar to Van Ingen's (2016) experiences with women in boxing and art, I wrestle with ethics, ontology and epistemology, often finding myself "getting lost" (Van Ingen, 2016, p. 472) and confused grappling with multiple sources amongst a breadth of empirical material. However, similar to Giardina (2017), I "embrace the struggle(s)" (p. 264) that accompany growth and agree that the journey of continually reinventing understandings can support innovation in research. In the pages that follow, I illustrate how getting lost amongst multiple knowledges can inspire innovative discoveries in research. The result of my struggles resulted in an embodied and entangled ethnographic research design. As Lather (2014) describes:

While the illusion of neat and tidy research has long been troubled, methodological examination tends to set up either-or dynamics in terms of “old school” and “what-comes-next” sorts of practices. Yet in the complex ecology of qualitative research in the present moment, the task is to move beyond the capture of a narrow scientism where qualitative research is reduced to an instrumentalism that meets the demands of audit culture, to move, rather, toward inventing practices that do not yet exist. (p. 8)

In this methodology chapter, I overview my process of designing and applying an entangled methodological structure that did not exist previously. Before this, I offer a brief description of Barad’s (2007) ‘entanglement’ and the way that I am understanding it in the context of this methodology.

### ***Entanglement***

A discussion on an entangled ethnography requires a definition of Karen Barad’s (2007) entanglement. As one of the many concepts that comes out of Barad’s theory of agential realism, entanglement acknowledges the agency of matter and the interconnectivity of human and non-human entities. As described in the literature review, many feminist scholars interested in thinking through the complex lived experiences of moving and gendered bodies are working with Barad’s concepts. They are considering how multiple aspects of human life are at the same time material-discursive and cumulatively influencing lived experiences that are perpetually in motion (Baxter, 2020; Clark & Thorpe, 2019; Coffey, 2019). Of the many concepts being applied in research settings, I chose to work with entanglement. Below, I offer a quote from Barad (2003) that demonstrates how I understand entanglement:

Indeed, there is a host of material-discursive forces— including ones that get labeled “social,” “cultural,” “psychic,” “economic,” “natural,” “physical,” “biological,” “geopolitical,” and “geological”—that may be important to particular (entangled) processes of materialization. (Barad, 2003, p. 810)

Barad (2003) describes how numerous material-discursive formations are simultaneously influencing the becoming of materiality and contributing to an ongoing

process of “materialisation.” As the title of this thesis suggests, I conceptualise women’s experiences in Yoga lifestyles as becomings. This points to the way that I understand entanglement in lived experiences and in methodology. I define becoming as a mutually implicated, continual process of entanglement that consists of both human and non-human materiality. This becoming considers the agency of materiality and is informed by multiple sources of knowledge.

Entanglements in this methodological structure are arising as simultaneously ontological, epistemological and ethical. Further, these entanglements transcend distinctions of past and present connecting ways of understanding existence that are not bound by time. Barad (2017) writes, “quantum superpositions and, relatedly, quantum entanglements open up possibilities for understanding how the ‘new’ and the ‘old’ – indeed, multiple temporalities – are diffractively threaded through and are inseparable from one another” (p. 69). Considering the range of both ancient and contemporary teachings on Yoga and the similarities over time, it is helpful to think through these bodies of knowing not as necessarily distinct, but as cumulative. In this understanding of knowing and being, insights from multiple knowledge sources are implicated in the entanglement of being (ontology), knowing (epistemology) and doing (ethics).

In relation to this methodology, I was interested in the potential breadth of understanding that could be gained through acknowledging and entangling multiple knowledge sources throughout this research process. My understanding of a feminist-yogic entanglement of ethics, knowing and being influences all aspects of this research including my field notes, observations, personal reflections and analysis of findings. In the initial stages of research design, entanglement was established through a dialogue that I built between two bodies of literature (Yoga philosophy and feminist theory). My desire to entangle knowledges demonstrates my interest in both learning broadly about Yoga lifestyles and building a project that could help the women feel comfortable in a research setting. It also supports my interest in breaking down barriers between knower/known, Eastern/Western, material/discursive, social/environmental.

Combining aspects of contemporary Western feminist theory and ancient Eastern Yoga philosophy, I am problematising the notion that new and Western knowledges are necessarily innovative and that progressive thinking is always linear. Caudwell (2011)

makes a similar comment in her critique of the ‘wave’ metaphor in feminisms that suggests there is benefit in dislocating “dominant narratives of linearity and progress” (p. 121) to uncover multiple trajectories that provide nuance along different timelines. Acknowledging similarities and differences found throughout ‘new’ and ‘old’ knowledge sources, I demonstrate how multiple ways of knowing have relevance and can simultaneously benefit a research setting.

There are some academics who have considered Yoga philosophy in research settings (Buckingham, 2017; Ergas, 2014; Morley, 2001, 2008; Sullivan et al., 2018). In a recent chapter by Madison (2020), she describes how the ethical practices of mindfulness (including stillness, deep attention, self-awareness and connection) can benefit ethnographic research. This research extends upon Madison’s (2020) to consider how the embodied philosophies of Yoga lifestyle practitioners might be able to inform the design and process of an entire feminist ethnographic research project. In Figure 1 below, I present an image that shows my initial attempts at building a dialogue between feminist theory and Yoga philosophy at the beginning of this research process. The entanglements I identified were based on my embodied understandings of Yoga philosophy (white lettering) and my knowledge of feminist principles (green lettering) prior to engaging with the women of this study:

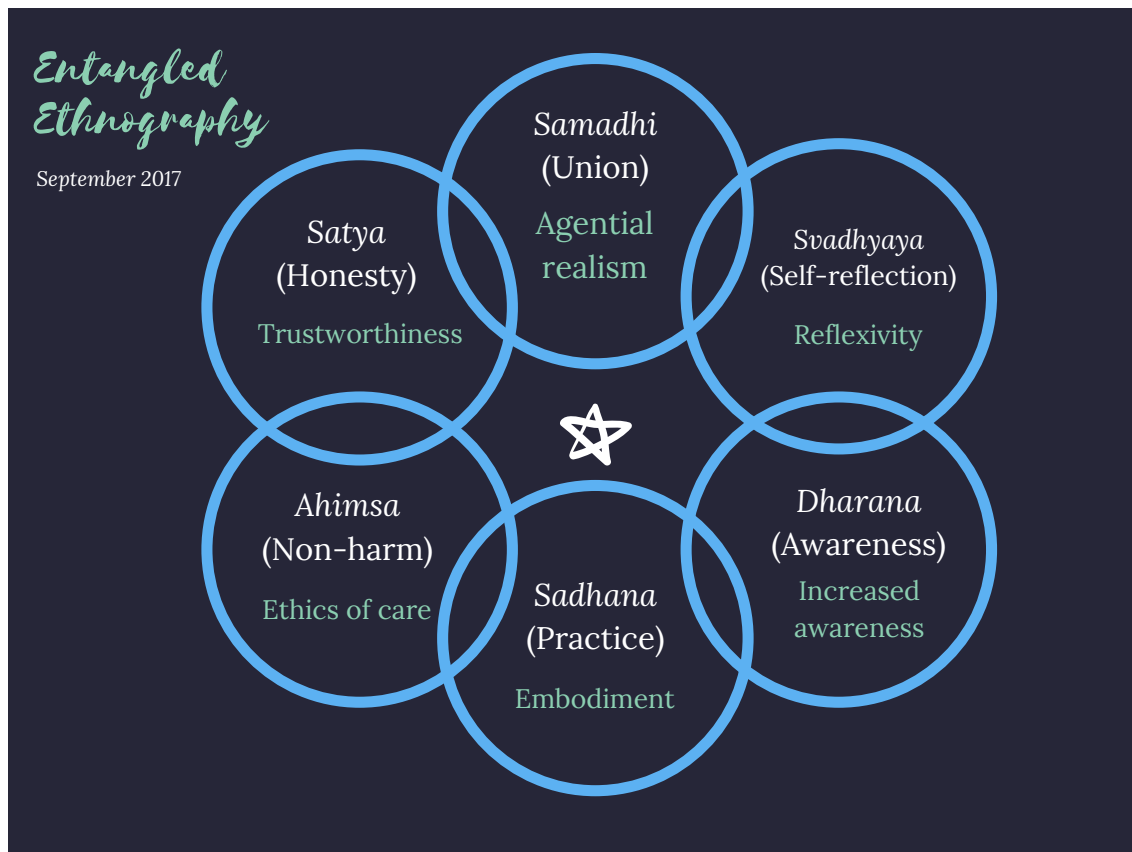


Figure 1: Entangled knowledges.

Interestingly, the entangled concepts shown above and the translations for *Sanskrit* terms used shifted as my research unfolded through a cumulative process of learning. As I gathered more information from the women and read various interpretations of Yoga texts whilst immersing myself in the research, my understandings of the entanglements that were most impactful changed (this is discussed in Chapter Seven). The teachings of Yoga and the practices of feminisms are continually evolving as new populations expand understandings. This research mirrors these perpetual shifts. Illustrating how the most influential entanglements between Yoga and feminisms shift in response to my increasing awareness in this research, I am able to reflect the learning gained after moving with the women of this research.

After identifying multiple opportunities for the knowledges of Yoga and feminisms to build an epistemological dialogue, I began to consider how my understanding of the concept of entanglement could also be informing the ways that I engage with ontology and ethics. Below, I reflect on Barad's concept of an ethico-onto-epistemological entanglement and discuss how this has influenced my research.

## **An ethico-onto-epistemological entanglement**

In the previous section, I discussed how I began articulating an entanglement between yogic and feminist knowledges in ethnographic research. Below, I describe how I conceptualise lived experiences as entanglements of being, knowing and doing that are always in motion. In Kaufmann's (2017) discussion around theory, she critiques the dominance of Western theory to consider how "Indigenous and quantum thought may change the narrative structure of traditional Western theory, allowing for qualitative research in/through being" (p. 423). Below, Kaufmann (2017) reflects on how multiple ways of knowing are intra-acting and contributing towards a world that is continually arriving through our being:

May we become in being. May we release the dead theory in our hands and breathe a coming to know of being. May we become an inquiry as yet unseen, a being in intra-action with reverence and humility. May our work become a knowing/being of a world to become. (p. 425)

Kaufmann's (2017) writing alludes to a continual becoming that is "as yet unseen" (p. 425) and places priority on maintaining presence and learning through being. This returns discussion to the topic of embodiment. As discussed, building a dialogue between feminist and yogic knowledges considers how multiple ways of knowing can interact and mutually benefit an embodied ethnography. Moving amongst this work, I consider how matter comes to matter through a process of embodied entanglement that brings together ways of being (ontology), knowing (epistemology) and behaving (ethics) as mutually implicated aspects of a continually becoming Yoga lifestyle.

### ***Ontology of union***

In Jackson's (2016) writing on the ontology of a backflip, she describes this complex movement as a "process of creative transformation" (p. 191). Her writing prompted me to consider my assumptions around the nature of existence in this research and inspired me to inquire into lived experiences through an entangled understanding of ontology that could produce "a path of creativity and an experimentation with the new" (p. 191).



I found great inspiration reflecting on the ontology of Yoga philosophy and considered how practitioners' embodied beliefs around the nature of being could influence the entirety of this research process. Yoga is an embodied practice of non-duality (Buckingham, 2017). The word Yoga itself is translated as "to yoke" or "to bind" (Jain, 2014, p. 25). Many popular Yoga publications describe Yoga as *union* (Desikachar, 1995; Satchidananda, 1978). Yoga lifestyle practitioners welcome the various practices of Yoga into their lives with the intention of experiencing moments of union with their surroundings. It is written that these moments of union will eventually lead the practitioner to continual states of bliss (*samādhi*). *Samādhi* is also described as complete absorption or oneness with the entire universe (Satchidananda, 1978).

Moving through this research as a long-term Yoga practitioner, I am engaging with the teachings of Yoga and have experienced moments that I could articulate as the embodiment of yogic union. When attempting to weave these moments into words, I found it difficult to place these expansive, sensory and complex experiences into a language that could adequately represent my embodied understandings of yogic union. As such, I found myself continually drawn to publications engaging with feminist new materialisms and posthumanism. These theories enable scholars to articulate an intricately interconnected existence that is inclusive of all materiality (Barad, 2007; Braidotti, 2018; Francombe, 2013; Fullagar, 2020; Grosz, 2010).

Over the course of this research, I found increasing relevance in Barad's (2007) concept of entanglement (as described above). It is from an understanding of ontology as entanglement that this methodological process, the women's lived experiences of yogic union, and feminist theory are brought into a dialogue. Entanglement as my philosophy on existence further influenced my understandings of both epistemology and ethics, as I expand upon below.

### ***Embodied ways of knowing***

Writing on women's ways of knowing (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986) and embodied ways of knowing (Barbour, 2004, 2018b) encouraged me to think broadly on how I might be able to accommodate the multiple ways that contemporary women Yoga practitioners are gathering information throughout their experiences in daily life.

Ways of knowing for women Yoga practitioners are multi-faceted and they are also embodied. The moving body, as a site for the attainment of knowledge, has a strong foundation in feminist literature (Barbour, 2011; Grosz, 1994; Sheets-Johnstone, 1999; Silk, Andrews & Thorpe, 2017). Throsby (2013) states that the decision to feature the body in research can, at times, represent a political statement. The prevalence of the senses in her work evokes emotional response in the reader and allows the leaky, complex, powerful, vulnerable body of a woman to be present and valued in a research setting. In Roy's (2014) writing on women surfers in the United Kingdom, she further considers how "taking emotions seriously" (p. 41) in research settings can broaden understandings of lived experiences for participants.

Yoga is an embodied practice that demands the physical presence of the practitioner (Smith, 2007). Academics researching Yoga claim that a more nuanced understanding of the teachings can be acquired when researchers (as practitioners) participate in Yoga and gain personal experience (Smith, 2007; Todres, 2008). As such, embodied ways of knowing played an integral role throughout the entire research process. My place as an embodied researcher, and the practitioners' embodied experiences of learning through their bodies, were instrumental throughout this ethnography.

There are many considerations when gaining insight into embodied ways of knowing, particularly in relation to representation (Chadwick, 2017; Francombe, 2013). As mentioned briefly above, the complicated task of representing knowledge that is embodied, sensory and subjective is compounded by the complexity of topics arising out of the research (for example, yogic union). This particular challenge prompted me to regularly question how I might be able to represent these incredibly nuanced, subtle ways of knowing.

Informed by the structure of feminist research featuring embodiment, I offer a range of opportunities for the women to demonstrate their understandings. Methods of active participation (Buckingham & Degen, 2012; Francombe, 2013), journal writing (Lea, Philo & Cadman, 2016), focus groups (Atkinson & Permuth-Levine, 2009), engaging in shared physical activity (Olive & Thorpe, 2018), in-depth interviews (Hesse-Biber, 2007) and observations alongside my written reflections on sensory experiences (Pink, 2007) prioritised the moving body as a knowing entity, an important phenomena arising

through this entanglement of theory and experience. Acknowledging the importance of bodies in the entanglement of knowing and being while moving amongst this feminist project necessarily brought me to a consideration of ethics.

### *Awareness of ethics*

Tracy (2010) suggests that aspects of ‘good’ qualitative research include rich rigor, sincerity, a worthy topic, a significant contribution and a consideration of ethics. Both feminist scholars and Yoga practitioners place importance on ethics. Adopting an ontological assumption of entanglement increased my awareness around the ways that I might be influencing the research. In Barad’s (2007) book *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, she suggests that all experiences are intricately influencing surroundings through mutually implicated intra-actions. Contemplating the ways that individual actions can alter surroundings on micro and macro levels has greatly influenced this inquiry.

Acknowledging entanglement and the importance of ethical action in this research, I regularly reflected on the values of Yoga that I found most relevant when moving alongside the women in this study. Although there were many teachings that contributed towards my feminist-yogic ethical stance, I predominantly drew inspiration from *ahimsā* as a practice of kindness. I found many occasions where writing on a feminist ethics of care (Ellis, 2007, 2017; Noddings, 1984; Orr, 2014) could inform my embodied practices of *ahimsā*.

The previous image of entangled concepts (see Figure 1 above) defines *ahimsā* as ‘non-harm.’ This definition comes from texts written by Satchidananda (1978) and Desikachar (1995). As this project progressed, my translation of *ahimsā* shifted from ‘non-harm’ to ‘kindness’ (described further in Chapter Six). As a regular practice of kindness, I expressed continued empathy and appreciation for the women of this study. Similar to Deborah Orr’s (2014) discussion on the mutually beneficial aspects of a feminist ethics of care and Buddhist practices of mindful compassion in research, I found the combination of *ahimsā* and ethics of care to mutually contribute towards building a space of trust inside this ethnography. As Ellis (2017) suggests, there is no end to the consideration of ethics in a research setting. In this entangled, embodied, feminist ethnography, my ethical decisions were informed by a continual process of

reflection. Maintaining efforts towards increasing my awareness and taking all opportunities to be more kind and caring in this study greatly influenced my ability to connect with the women.

## **Research design**

To deeply understand the multi-faceted layers of the women's Yoga lifestyles, and considering my position as an experienced Yoga teacher in the Waikato Yoga community, I chose to situate this research locally and within a feminist, embodied ethnography (Atkinson, 2012; Buch & Staller, 2007). Keeping this project local and maintaining close physical proximity to participants allowed me ample opportunity to move with the women throughout their daily lives. The stage of accumulating empirical material continued just over the course of a year (14 months) starting September 2017 and finishing November 2018. Methods consisted of two in-depth interviews for each participant (one semi-structured at the beginning of the research, one unstructured at the end), two mid-way focus groups (one in Kirikiriroa/Hamilton, one in Wāingaroa/Raglan), ongoing observations whilst moving with the women, six months of journaling for the practitioners and reflexive researcher practices that I maintained throughout the entire process.

## **Recruitment**

For this research I worked with 19 women Yoga practitioners who self-identify as living a Yoga lifestyle and have been doing so for over five years. All of the women had some understanding of lifestyle teachings from ancient Yoga texts. They were either aware of the lifestyle system of the *Yoga sūtras of Patañjali* or cognisant that Yoga was comprised of more than solely *āsana*. The particular demographics, Yoga practices, and characteristics of the women are described below. The women were recruited through flyers, email and social media (see Appendices 2 and 4).

When initiating recruitment, my intimate insider status (as an experienced Yoga teacher in the Waikato) allowed me immediate access and a process to develop trust within the community (Pavlidis & Olive, 2014; Roulston, 2010). I began gathering a number of participants through personal contacts. Reaching out to women I was already familiar with through email, social media contact and/or face-to-face interaction quickly

amalgamated a growing group of interested individuals (see Appendices 4 and 5 for Research Information Sheet and Participant Consent Form). Initial stages of recruitment were quick and, at this point, I paused to reflect on the range of voices I was accumulating. Recruiting from within my personal contacts was providing me with many voices that were similar to my own (strong physical practice, 30-40 years of age).

A couple of weeks into recruitment, I began to pay particular attention to gathering a broader range of voices. This prompted a search for individuals from different cultural backgrounds, of different ages, and immersed in different Yoga disciplines. I placed a recruitment poster in a number of local studios (see Appendix 2) and reached out to contacts asking for direction. Searching beyond studio spaces enabled me to find women living Yoga lifestyles outside of urban locations and not immediately visible within the community.

Finding a range of voices took considered effort as these women were not immediately accessible online or in person. Searching broadly resulted in a more diverse group of women contributing to this research. The women of this study differ in age, socio-economic status, ethnicity and cultural backgrounds. They are living in various situations amongst the city limits and rurally. The women also practice a variety of Yoga styles and incorporate a range of teachings throughout their daily lives.

## **The practitioners (Research participants)**

It is important to note that before formally engaging with participants, an application to the ethics committee was submitted and approved. The University of Waikato's ethics committee approved this research on July 17, 2017 and their formal letter of acceptance is attached to this thesis (see Appendix 6).

Below, the participants of this study introduce themselves through a short autobiography (for my reflections see Appendix 7). The women provided consent for me to use a self-selected and/or mutually agreed upon pseudonym. Biographies are written by the women and follow a suggested (but not mandated) formula. Only minor grammatical changes were made to the women's original submissions. The range of names chosen, and unique descriptions offer insight into this varied group of women.

### ***Yoga practitioner autobiographies***

**Aroha.** 43-47. Have practiced for 31 years. Began teaching in 2005, travelled to Jamaica to certify in Kemeti Yoga in 2016 and am the first teacher to introduce it to Aotearoa. Utilised Yoga to survive and heal from trauma, and have a huge determination for sharing it with communities that otherwise would not experience it. Respect and adore all forms of Yoga.

**Aurora.** 35-39. 15 years of practice. Teaches both strong *vinyāsa* (*āsana* sequences), flow, and restorative Yin Yoga.<sup>11</sup> I am passionate about helping my students find their version of the practice. Be it a challenging pose, or flow sequence, or a deeply connecting Yin practice. Yoga gives me the opportunity to slow down and connect with my body and breath and step into a quiet space either on my mat or with those who I am guiding as a teacher.

**Breeze.** 55-60. European. 13 years of practice. *Hatha* based training. 7 years of teaching variations of *hatha*, *vinyāsa* and *āsana* alignment. Seeking, joyful, calm. Favourite practices: *prāṇāyāma* and *vinyāsa*, breathing with ease and flowing with awareness.

**Hamsa.** 35-39. 22 years of practice. Teaches a hybrid Yoga. Trained in a traditional style. Lived in Yoga communities. Excitable, knowledgeable, soft voice. Favourite practices: *Yoga nidra* (guided deep relaxation) and a deeply connected *āsana* flow. Yoga gives me the opportunity to connect and listen to the guidance that arrives from within and without me. Through breath, movement and continued listening I am learning with the help of Yoga.

**Kakini.** 54-59. Kiwi. Practising properly for 6 years. Diploma in Yoga teaching from Wellpark College of Natural Therapies (2012/2013). Yin training in 2017. Teaches a blended traditional Yoga. Extrovert, loud, loves to learn new stuff. Favourite practices: *prāṇāyāma*, *trāṭak* (candle gazing), and a slow therapeutic *āsana* practice.

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<sup>11</sup> Yin Yoga is influenced by modern medicine and anatomy principles as well as Taoist meridian and acupuncture practices from China (Grilley, 2012). It is a slower practice that features sustained postures (between 3-5 minutes).

**Jyoti.** 35-39. I have practised *mantra* (chanting) Yog<sup>12</sup> since I was 9 years old and *hatha* Yoga for more than 15 years. I teach Yin and *hatha* flow. I am trained in classical Yoga and Yoga therapy. My daily practice is *Kriya* Yog. Yog is my path, life and discipline, I know myself through Yog. It is my tool for introspection and freedom from material ties and duality.

**Maha Shakti.** 40-45 years. Pākehā.<sup>13</sup> 10 years of practice. Trained and teaches *Kundalini* Yoga as taught by Yogi Bhajan. Certified *Radiant child* yoga teacher. Guides and supports others to connect with their true self and elevate themselves to higher levels of consciousness through the practice. Lived in Asia for 18 years. First introduced to *Kundalini* Yoga attending a class held on the rooftops of Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

**Manaia.** 40-45. New Zealander. 17 years of practice. Teaches power *vinyāsa* and Yin Yoga. Trained in Power Living Yoga. High energy, strong alignment cues, humorous, carries far voice. Favourite practices: Strong *vinyāsa* flow, Yin and daily meditation.

**Marama.** 41-46. Pākehā. Qualified teacher for 14 years. Teaches a hybrid Yoga. Trained in traditional Iyengar and *Ashtanga-vinyāsa*. Currently completing a teacher training in Embodied Flow. Co-founder/owner of an eco-retreat, director of Yoga and bodywork. Passionate about assisting others in re-connecting with their most authentic self through Yoga/breath awareness/meditation, Hawaiian massage, Craniosacral therapy, Reiki and Intuitive guidance. Loves animals, surfing, painting, writing, adventure and anything that includes being in a natural environment. Favourite practices: anything that allows a deeper connection to Self and the great One-ness<sup>14</sup>.

**Marina.** 45-49. From the city of Pune in India. Currently pursuing a Masters in Sociology and have been practicing Yoga and *āsanas* for more than 12 years. I enjoy *prāṇāyāma* and my favourite is doing *surya namaskār* (sun salutations). I enjoy these the most because they are improving my flexibility in my body and the humming bee in my mind.

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<sup>12</sup> Jyoti's prefers to use the ancient Sanskrit spelling here. 'Yog' references the Sanskrit 'yuj' and translates as *samadhi* (union). The word Yoga is not found in the *Sanskrit* language. It is a popular and recent spelling used by contemporary populations.

<sup>13</sup> Pākehā is a Te Reo Māori word that often is used to refer to anyone who is not Māori and residing in Aotearoa. The decision to use Pākehā (often by white New Zealand residents) is a personal choice.

<sup>14</sup> Marama capitalised "Self" and "One-ness" in her autobiography. I have left this for emphasis as I sense it was a conscious decision made by Marama.

**Michael.** 45-49. Pākehā. 25 years practice first with Iyengar, then Ashram traditional yoga. Background in fitness, Pilates and public health. Teaching 12 years (Yin, *hatha*, *Yoga nidra*, flow). Teaching style: modern while honouring traditional. Classes are physical, fluid and fun, plenty of options, lots of breath work and always a guided relaxation. For me Yoga is like a good friend, it is there keeping you real and helps you enjoy being you.

**Nutmeg.** 32-36. From the United States. 11 years of practice. Love to move, so normally teach and practice *vinyāsa* styles. Sees the value in making Yoga a welcoming practice, a comfortable space for everyone. I also love a good restorative class where I can practice slowing down my busy body and mind.

**Peanut.** 88-93. New Zealander. 11 years of yoga. Enjoy Yin, *hatha* and *Ashtanga-vinyāsa*. Continuously learning. Hoping to develop skills a lot further, and to develop my understanding of how to create a peaceful environment for us all to live in.

**Sophie.** 35-39. European. 10 years of practice. Teaches *hatha* yoga trained in the original hot yoga sequence and Yin style. Yoga is all encompassing. Being kind (to self included) is just as important as having a healthy body. Favourite practice always changes, right now, it is helping others and meditation. Combination of strong and smooth voice.

**Tara.** 35-40. 20 years of practice and 14 teaching. Certified *Ashtanga-vinyāsa* teacher. Developed a varied teaching style, studying with a wide range of teachers from different schools. *Vinyāsa*, power, shadow, Yin and restorative Yoga. I believe there is a wealth of access and tools to experience ‘Yoga’ in this modern world. As a student and teacher, it is my duty to remain open to all possibilities of practice. Yoga, for me, is vital for maintaining physical and mental health, with the hope of continuing life with more grace, acceptance and ease.

**T.** 20-25. Kiwi. 5 years of practice. Student. Only lived in cities. Curious, analytical, hot headed. Practices Yoga breath every day and especially in times of stress or sadness. I have taken the practice of being aware of my body in Yoga into my daily life. By being aware of how I'm feeling and why, why someone else may be feeling or acting a certain



way, essentially thinking about all possible causes for anything that strikes my interest. Yoga has been flowing into every aspect of my life since starting 5 years ago. My search for and practice of sustainability is a result of thinking about cause and effect that I learnt through Yoga practice.

**Robin.** 30-35. American. Teaches alignment inspired *vinyāsa*. Combines attention to detail in the *āsana* and a linking of movement to breath to connect to a flow state. Embraces elements of Iyengar and *ashtanga* Yoga. Believes in a deep transformation as a result of the practice.

**Uma.** 35-39. American. 30+ years of practice (a bit sporadic in constancy, starting around the age of 4). Lived and went to school in Yogaville, VA for several years as a young child and lived there again as an adult. Trained to teach Integral Yoga, *hatha*, *prāṇāyāma*, and meditation. Curious, studious, a quiet observer. Favourite practices: *prāṇāyāma* and walking meditation.

**Winifred.** 45-50 years old. Grew up with ballet and loved the movement discipline, the dedication, the artistry and the music. Found Yoga in my early twenties after a few classes in Melbourne. Taught a learned version of Yoga from books (and occasional classes I'd attend) to fellow small town villagers in the mountains of Australia for 10 years. Have been teaching and practicing *Ashtanga-vinyāsa* Yoga and other gentler forms for 12 years now as owner/operator of an established studio in Kirikiriroa/Hamilton. I find Yoga practice to somehow ground, sustain and to light the way no matter what life brings.

## Methods

Working with this varied group of women and considering the entanglement of feminist theory with Yoga philosophy, greatly influenced my process of engaging with methods throughout this project. Below, I present the multiple strategies used for gathering insights from the women Yoga practitioners of this study. The methods used over the course of this ethnography include: observations, interviews, journals and focus groups. Employing a multi-method approach reflects my desire to learn broadly about the lived experiences of the women. Similar to Esbjörn-Hargens (2006) and Olive (2015a), I

found that working with multiple methods over a longer period of time, and applying feminist ethics, allowed me to access greater trust and depth with the women.

For each method, I overview theories guiding application and highlight my unique engagement with each method, as catered to this context. The methods used in this study are traditional ethnographic methods. However, in this study, I adopt and shape methods to suit this research. The embodied philosophies of Yoga practitioners were taken into consideration while working within a feminist, entangled, ethnographic approach. To this end, I have renamed methods (where necessary). This decision was made in an effort to reduce the presence of academic language in my interactions with the women. This conscientious choice reflects my desire to value multiple knowledge sources and reduce epistemological hierarchies.

Prioritising less formal ways of describing all academic and/or theory-laden terminology in my interactions with the women practitioners helped to continually disrupt potential researcher-participant power dynamics (Reinharz & Davidman, 1992). In all of my interactions with participants and the community in general, I referred to this process using non-academic language (as often as possible) and regularly expressed my appreciation for gaining insight from the women Yoga practitioners of this study. Instead of taking the role of a researcher with ultimate knowledge, I hoped to occupy the role of an entangled learner, growing and sharing amongst a group of women mutually building a rich understanding of complex lived experiences in Yoga lifestyles (Owton & Allen-Collinson, 2014).

### ***Moving in life (Observations)***

Feminist ethnographers use observation to document patterns of behaviour and social dynamics that are characteristic of the culture within which they are situated (Buch & Staller, 2007; Reinharz & Davidman, 1992). Barbour (2019) suggests that ethnographers interested in moving bodies should extend their observations beyond everyday activities to consider how moving bodies are experiencing their particular practices in space and time. Thorpe and Olive (2016) mention that observations in research settings give the researcher the opportunity to expand understandings beyond interviews to gather information both on what the participants ‘say they do’ but also on what they ‘do’ as they move throughout their daily lives.

As such, observations for this research focused on the ways that the women were moving in their lives. This method allowed me the opportunity to add complexity to my understandings of the women's lifestyles. Field notes were taken during a range of situations, and in all entries I considered the multiple formations of human and non-human materiality impacting any experience. After shared movement practices, I wrote extensive notes on my sensory, interpersonal, and interconnected experiences. Adopting an entangled understanding of lived experience, my notes included a wide range of aspects present in any given moment that were at the same time social, natural, political and corporeal. Taking in the smells of incense and oils, the lighting and heating in the studio space, the subtle and gross sounds both inside and outside of my physical body, the touch of skin while pressing against other material entities, sweat and breath, the women's facial expressions, pauses and unique word choices were all included in my observations.

Sensory ethnographic approaches in embodied research are employed by an increasing range of feminist scholars (Pink, 2015; Thorpe, 2012a; Throsby, 2013) and offer the ability to extend observations beyond what is being heard and seen to what is being felt and absorbed. In Buckingham and Degen's (2012) ethnographic work, they consider how their embodiment of Yoga alongside participants facilitated a "sensory, tactile dialogue between the researchers and research subjects offering a kinetic language that runs parallel and additional to verbal language" (p. 329). Buckingham and Degen (2012) suggest that teaching Yoga, as a research method, enabled them to build trusting relationships through care in physical spaces. Below, the authors reflect on how the practices of physical Yoga *āsana* additionally made it possible to gather insights into the women's complex and lived experiences:

Doing yoga together, getting into awkward positions which often provoked laughter, developed a sense of camaraderie, or what we might call a "carnal sorority" (inspired by Wacquant's coining of the term "carnal fraternity," 2004). This enabled encouragement and reflection through proximity, if not through sensuous fleshly contact. (p. 337)

In the above quote, Buckingham and Degen (2012) describe how shared sensory experiences in Yoga can provide opportunity to connect through movements that are

awkward and vulnerable. The researchers attribute their regular physical presence in *āsana* classes, throughout their ethnographic work with women sex workers, to fostering the potential for building trusting relationships with participants. They suggest that twisting into uncomfortable shapes in Yoga *āsana* classes with women facilitated an intimacy as well as a “sense of camaraderie” (p. 337) that benefitted their work.

Similar to Buckingham & Degen (2012), I too learned more about the women through our shared movement practices that may have otherwise gone unnoticed. In Moore and Yamamoto’s (2012) book *Beyond Words* they offer strategies for observing moving bodies that include discussions around the processes of movement over static body language. Similar to these sensory and embodied research practices, I considered how moving bodies are continually shifting and have the potential to offer more insight into the complexities of lived experiences in Yoga.

Observing participants in a range of situations as an intimate insider and as a trusted friend brings ethical issues and throughout this research process, I continually assessed the confidentiality of the women and the parameters of the research (Owton & Allen-Collinson, 2014; Taylor, 2011). As such, observations focused primarily around formal research interactions (conversations or focus groups) and shared movement practices. Observations made outside of these settings were permitted when the women and I were specifically discussing the research and/or I checked permission for inclusion (see Appendix 8).

### ***Conversations (Interviews)***

In conversations, practitioners joined me for two formal, recorded conversations (in-depth interviews) lasting approximately one hour each. The first conversations took place between September – October 2017 and the second over the last three months of the ethnography (September – November, 2018). For these conversations, I drew upon models of feminist, in-depth interviewing as methods that prioritise care through considered language choices and attentive, affirmative listening strategies (Hesse-Biber, 2007; Roulston, 2010).

The first of the conversations followed a semi-structured format and each of the women received a copy of the list of questions prior to meeting (see Appendix 9 for questions)

(Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007; Smith & Caddick, 2012). As suggested by Hammersley and Atkinson (1995), interviews in an ethnographic study may benefit from less formal structures. This was considered in our shared conversations and while the women were given a list of questions, the conversations were not formulaic and did not follow from one question to the next with rigidity. Instead, priority was placed on allowing the women to expand upon questions that were personally inspiring.

This strategy revealed the topics that were of most relevance for these contemporary practitioners. After each interview, I took the time to write notes on sensory experiences, silences, facial expressions and any emotions that arose for both myself and the women during conversations. As Thorpe (2012a) notes, these additional pieces of information can broaden understandings beyond what is said. Including observations on unspoken aspects of the broader research setting (for example, clothing choices and atmosphere of the room), can contribute to a broader analysis of findings. Considering the myriad of components influencing the research space can expand analysis of interviews to include elements that are at the same time social and environmental (Thorpe, 2012a).

Keeping conversations open and following the flow of topics as determined by the women, enabled them to reveal their knowledge without my interjections shaping their insights towards predetermined outcomes (Barbour, 2019). In reviewing some of the transcripts, I noticed many moments where the women expand to describe experiences and topics that were much more interesting than my original questions. For example, in conversing with some participants I can recall many moments in which lengthy explanations and creative metaphors were offered well beyond the scope of the initial question I asked.

In some cases, no questions could have resulted in the breadth of insight some women offered in the depth of our discussions. Though expansive communication was prioritised, I also made a considered effort (particularly throughout these initial, formal conversations) to ensure that all questions on the template were answered. The questions for this first round of conversations covered areas of interest related to initial research questions including particular lifestyle choices, ancient and contemporary influences, challenges and joys that surround their dedication to practice, and a broad discussion around the continued journey with Yoga as experienced over time.

After each of these initial interviews, I sent an email with transcripts and asked any questions that may have been prompted while transcribing. Again, email responses to the transcripts and related questions revealed greater depth than I anticipated. Insights into the rich wisdom embodied by these women was openly shared with me throughout this process. This deep and vulnerable sharing began in these initial conversations and continued to deepen over the course of 14 months spent moving together. Building a trusting space alongside women who similarly embody Yoga philosophies opened discussions into a range of topics that were at times esoteric and extremely personal. This would not have been possible without my embodied knowledge of Yoga philosophy and my feminist approach to ethical care both informing my research process.

Throughout the first round of conversations, it became increasingly important to communicate in ways that helped the women feel at ease. Listening with care and encouragement enabled the women to feel comfortable navigating through their thoughts and explanations (Reinharz & Davidman, 1992). Being a woman with experience in Yoga, gave me an embodied understanding of the styles of communication and the range of topics that were appropriate to discuss in this research with women Yoga practitioners. Affirming the women's knowledge, practicing good listening skills and taking a position of curiosity enabled these partially structured in-depth conversations (interviews) to cover great breadth and presented extremely nuanced insights that were all individually and uniquely articulated by the women of this study.

The second round of conversations were also in-depth but followed an unstructured format (Smith & Caddick, 2012). Prior to the final conversations with the women, I sent an email with three general themes as topics for conversations. This approach of sending general themes differed from the strategy I used in the initial interviews (for which I had a set of specific questions). Themes included: the journey of building a Yoga lifestyle alongside the pressures of daily life, ways of connecting with surroundings or understandings of yogic union in everyday experiences, and ideas around service and action in a contemporary Yoga lifestyle. During these final conversations, the women were encouraged to bring their journals and reflect on their entries. This final, formal interaction allowed space for fluid conversations. Discussions

followed the lead of the practitioner without any need to return to a list of questions. As such, these final conversations offered more opportunity to learn about the individual journeys of these women over the course of the ethnography and in their Yoga lifestyles. As before, I ensured that I was actively listening and responding through affirmative body language (nodding, smiling) (Smith & Caddick, 2012). These conversations concluded the research. By this time, the women and I had been working together for over a year and many strong relationships had formed. The trust and comfort we shared was revealed in these final conversations as often discussions dove directly into topics of great depth.

### ***Journals***

Each practitioner was asked to write personal observations in a journal gifted to them at the end of the first round of interviews. The women were asked to write in their journals at least once a week over the course of six months. This method resulted in a range of reactions that were both enthusiastic and not. Some of the women found these regular journal entries to be inspirational and used them to guide their personal practices. Others found them to be an added burden to an already busy schedule. Often, when I ran into the women who were not using their journals, they would apologise for their lack of engagement in their journaling. There was a guilt associated with not writing 'enough' in their journals.

I initiated weekly email contact with the group of women in an attempt at softening their sentiments around feeling the need to 'produce' journal entries. These weekly emails did not continue over the course of the entire ethnography, they began around a month into journaling and were maintained until the end of the six month journaling process. In these emails I offered writing prompts and encouraged the women to reflect in their journals. I regularly reminded the women that their journal entries could remain private, there was no expectation that entries needed to be shared at any time throughout this research. In this way, I hoped to offer the women control over the privacy and content of their writing. I reinforced the importance of feeling inspired rather than burdened by this task. This method was included in the research for those women who enjoy expressing themselves through writing and art.

Freedom to choose within this method of journaling gave participants a sense of control and this resulted in extremely varied entries. Fendt, Wilson, Jenkins, Dimmock, and Weeks (2014) similarly found that when participants were given autonomy and respect, they were able to gather more rich and individualised insights into lived experiences. Allowing the journaling method to work with the women (instead of forcing it upon them), my intention was to provide the practitioners with a feeling of ownership over the knowledge they wished to share and a sense of individual freedom within their overall experience as a participant (Lea, Philo & Cadman, 2016).

While I did not receive entries from some of the women, others provided lengthy entries. These included reflections on their personal journey with Yoga, their continual efforts on living with ethical teachings, and the struggles of being a woman in contemporary times. The journal entries that the women chose to share presented a range of styles and various topics of interest throughout the entirety of their daily lives. Journal entries ended up arriving to me in various forms. For example, some of the women wrote quick and short email responses that I would receive almost directly after my weekly prompts, one participant shared regular reflections through expressive poetry that she posted publicly on Facebook (and provided permission to access and reference in this research), another filled her journal with a combination of drawings, images and reflections. The variety of journaling methods used by the women illustrate the multi-faceted lifestyles the women are leading and the varied preferences in personally meaningful self-reflection techniques.

The journals were used at different time points throughout this research. Journals were present in our final, recorded conversations nearing the end of this study. Topics of discussion for these final conversations were prompted by themes arising out of empirical material as well as the women's journal entries. This resulted in varied discussions on topics that were relevant for each of the women. After the final conversations, I took pictures of pages that the women felt comfortable sharing with me and used the insights contained in these entries as additional findings during the analysis phase. Some quotes offered in this thesis are drawn from the women's journal reflections, this is indicated throughout.



### ***Group practice sessions (Focus groups)***

Two group practice sessions took place in the middle of the ethnographic timeline (February, 2018). One group practice session was held at the University of Waikato, Kirikiriroa/Hamilton and the other in a studio space I was able to rent in Wāingaroa/Raglan. The sessions lasted between one to two hours and included a movement component, food and discussion.

Set up for the group practice sessions was considered in great detail (see Appendix 10). Everything from the placement of mats (in a circle), the addition of design elements intended to encourage ease (plants, incense, candles), the design of the *āsana* practice (slow, modified sun salutation practice co-ordinated with the *Ganesh maha mantra*) (see Appendix 11), and the catered refreshments afterwards (vegan, gluten-free, dairy-free, herbal teas) were chosen with the intention of building community amongst a safe, comfortable environment prioritising care.

We began with a short movement practice. This was followed by gathering food and sitting for discussion. I opened the conversation portion of each session by sharing my personal Yoga journey. Being vulnerable in my struggle and joy demonstrated my comfort with the women and this set the tone for honest sharing (Harvey, Brown, Miller, Williams-Read, Tyndall & Murphy, 2016). After describing my journey in Yoga, I opened the conversation to the other women and maintained a low level of moderation. This enabled practitioners to communicate on a range of personally relevant topics in their own terms (Leavy, 2007). Seeing the women interacting within the focus groups facilitated observations on social-interactional dynamics (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2011). For example, I noted that in both group situations, individuals in positions that could be externally perceived as having more ‘authority’ in the Yoga community took the opportunity to share their insights and the women in the group made noticeable space for them to be heard.

Observing subtle power dynamics, I made considered efforts to ensure that all women were given the opportunity to speak, and at times, this required me to direct the conversation when certain voices began dominating the discussion. However, in general, I found that the two groups of women were extremely considerate of each other and most were aware of sharing time and providing space for all voices to be heard. Their

communication style was considerate and compassionate. In working through ideas together, the women unearthed concepts and shared deeply personal experiences of Yoga that they were previously unable to express (Leavy, 2007). In the Wāingaroa/Raglan focus group, the women recognised the importance of vulnerability and trust whilst sharing details with the group. They mentioned how the process of this research was facilitating a deep, internal inquiry and noted the importance of doing this self-reflection alongside a caring group of women.

The sessions brought a mixture of emotions from participants. Both laughter and tears were present in the two group practice sessions. Throughout all moments, the women demonstrated emotional support for their fellow practitioners. Listening intently and recognising opportunities to share similar experiences, the women interacted with empathy. Through affirmative and encouraging language (exhibited both verbally and physically), their considerate interactions facilitated a safe space where the women felt comfortable sharing their experiences. Of the 19 women participating in this study, 12 were able to attend a group practice session. Reasons for the women to miss group practice included prior engagements, confidentiality and/or preference for one-on-one sharing.

## **Ethical considerations**

Working closely alongside a group of women, with whom I was building trusting relationships, stimulated many ethical considerations and situations that gave me pause for reflection before action. When faced with ethical decisions, I continually returned to the practices of both Yoga and feminisms for guidance. *Ahimsā* and care were mutually informing my interactions with the women. Below, I discuss particular considerations that I navigated throughout the research with the help of the ethical practices of both Yoga and feminisms.

### ***Multiple roles***

As a researcher, Yoga teacher, and practitioner amongst the community, I was faced with experiences where the multiple roles I was embodying required careful navigation to ensure that this research and my space amongst the community reflected my values. Prioritising honesty and reflexivity, I allowed myself to be visible and did not hide away

from the opportunity to know the women of this study on multiple levels. Below is an experience that arose during the beginning phases of recruitment. One of the women in this vignette ends up becoming a participant (this is described below):

\*

*It's Friday night and there is a gig downtown.*

*A number of local bands are playing so my flatmate and I decide to head to the venue and check it out. I put on my vintage leather jacket...throw on some mascara...and run a brush through my hair. After a full day of reading existential philosophy and then teaching an extremely sweaty 'hot power' Yoga class, this is the most effort I can put into getting ready. I'm looking forward to getting out from behind the computer and away from my mat.*

\*

*We arrive at the venue to find ourselves amongst an extremely local punk rock scene. A thrasher band is playing and a small (but mighty) mosh pit<sup>15</sup> is beginning to take shape near the front. My friend grabs a beer and I order a glass of red.*

*We take our place on the periphery, cheers our glasses,  
and wait for the next band to start their set.*

\*

*The next band begins with a slamming guitar solo.*

*It's an extremely hard-core, heavy metal band and the lead singer is a hypnotic young woman with incredible style and an immense stage presence. She is throwing out a mixture of screaming and grunting while simultaneously whipping her hair around...*

*I...am...mesmerised...*

*A huge smile sweeps across my face as I begin to move to the music. I am sure that my Canadian enthusiasm stands out in this emo-driven crowd, but I can't help it...  
I am loving this act and excited to be getting more exposure to the local metal scene.*

\*

*Closing my eyes, I am taking it all in when I feel a tap on my shoulder...*

*I turn and see two young women who regularly take my Yoga classes.*

*They are visibly shocked/excited to see me.*

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<sup>15</sup> A 'mosh pit' sometimes forms at particularly aggressive or energetic concerts. It usually forms at the center of the crowd and typically near the front of the stage. It consists of pushing or slamming into each other 'moshing' and is normally both energetic and full of body contact.

*As a 39 year old woman who regularly teaches meditative styles of Yoga that feature soft music and deep breathing, I can understand their surprise when they find me in this space...I smile, give them both hugs, then ask them how they are enjoying the gig.*

*They say they are loving it and explain their connection with one of the bands.*

✱

*After a short exchange, more hugs and a clink of our glasses, they bounce off into the crowd. I watch as they join in with the young mosh pit crew near the front of the stage, and I smile thinking back to punk gigs I used to go to when I was in my twenties.*

*I turn to my friend and we laugh remembering the days of crowd surfing and moshing.*

*The days of thrashing my body are long gone, but I can still enjoy a wildly energetic metal or punk gig...on occasion...*

✱

I often run into students when I am at concerts, and at times, my enjoyment of loud music and a nice glass of red is met with a range of surprise and judgement. One of the young women in this scenario ended up being a participant in this research. In our first in-depth interview, we discussed this moment. We laughed at our ideas around stereotypes and expectations that yogis only wear cotton, listen to calm music and never consume alcohol. While this example could lead to a discussion on stereotypes, I use this vignette to highlight the multiple roles I occupy in this research.

The vignette above features one of many experiences where I was faced with the importance of considering my multiple roles as a teacher, researcher, friend, colleague and community member (Olive & Thorpe, 2011, 2018; Taylor, 2011). Allowing myself to be as authentic as possible enabled the women to see me as a Yoga practitioner and researcher who is vulnerable and has faults. In turn, this open sharing of myself in the research setting helped the women to similarly share themselves. I found that through revealing my perceived short-comings and personal experiences with doubt and fear, I was able to enter into better communication with the women.

As a Yoga teacher, sharing my humanity (for example, falling out of postures) often assists me in being able to connect with others. Within this research setting, admitting my faults helped to disrupt any arbitrary distance built between the women and my researcher self. Power dynamics are inherent in the relationship between a teacher-student and researcher-participant (Ellis, 2009). Reflecting on the multiple positions of

power I was occupying as an experienced Yoga teacher and researcher, I took active steps to dismantle these barriers through prioritising care, confidentiality and respect for the women (Toombs et al., 2017). Due to the extra measures of empathy and care I was taking throughout this research, and my position amongst this process as a vulnerable, open participant moving with the women, I ultimately built a number of profound, trusting friendships.

### ***Friendships and trust***

As the ethnographic research unfolded, I saw some of the women regularly through early morning movement practices, work together and common social interests that led to us attending live music performances, artistic and cultural events, Yoga trainings and hiking excursions together. Further, there were also many other ‘mundane’ ways in which our lives became entwined. In short, I developed friendships with some participants. Reflecting on the range of formal and casual moments shared with the women, I understand the intimacy, trust and depth that built this emotionally rich process of inquiry (Tillman-Healy, 2003).

This research features deep sharing amongst methods prioritising an ethics of care to understand the complexities of Yoga lifestyles. Employing a respectful and ethical process of moving alongside the women helped to foster friendships, however, it did not remove the presence of a power imbalance between researcher and participant (Owton & Allen-Collinson, 2014). Even though our relationships proved beneficial to this project and my experience amongst it, navigating power dynamics and the complexities of researcher-participant relationships required continual self-reflection and monitoring (Ellis, 2007).

Working closely with the women presented me with many ethical considerations throughout the research. I took inspiration from writing on feminist relational ethics to process my place and actions amongst the women and prioritised care in all instances (Ellis, 2007; Noddings, 1984; Olesen, 2011). Reading through my journal entries, I began to notice a pattern of continually reflecting on my relationships with the women and considering when it was acceptable to observe women who were also my friends. In one of my entries I wrote, “with relationship building comes conflict...what is ethically okay to observe?” (Research journal: February 20th, 2018). Maintaining caring, multi-

faceted, open and reciprocal relationships was of utmost importance throughout this project. Though there are many pitfalls to working alongside friends (Toombs et al., 2017), I have experienced that there are also many benefits when these relationships are maintained with care.

Bonds built between myself and the women of this study transcend the research setting and many remain close friends. Some relationships required consistent navigation and I found myself regularly monitoring my ethical guidelines to ensure that I was moving in accordance with my values of care and kindness. For example, during a portion of this work, I lived with one of the women of this study. This demanded that I navigate both her presence in my research, and in my personal life as a flatmate. This experience of being friends, sharing a living arrangement, and working respectfully in a research capacity, was made possible through a mutual desire to successfully sustain both the research and our friendship.

Though building trust in research is beneficial, there are many cautions that qualitative scholars discuss when considering working in close proximity with participants as insiders. Full immersion in a culture, alongside participants, has the potential to blind researchers to problematic conditions or behaviours that have become normalised within particular contexts (Pavlidis & Olive, 2014; Wheaton, 2002). Owton and Allen-Collinson (2014) suggest that complex dynamics of friendship in research require extra attention due to the emotional connection between researcher and participant. Being intricately and affectively invested in participants has the potential to influence findings.

In my own research, I reflected on many moments of hesitation where I wanted to protect my participants by not including certain critical insights around the Yoga culture, but I also desired to discuss important and problematic themes arising through this research. Deciding what to include and what to leave behind resulted in a continual process of finding balance between the values of care and honesty. My critical discussion of situations was regularly assessed to examine the necessity of including any potentially uncomfortable insights. Working closely with women, I care about their response to this work. While I do not shy away from addressing issues arising through this research, I carefully consider how criticality is used throughout this thesis. Opportunities for critical analysis of problematic situations are included when necessary.

In this way, I attempt to bring more awareness to pressing issues of contemporary Yoga culture that are influencing the embodied experiences for the women practitioners of this research.

In Owton and Allen-Collinson's (2014) article they illustrate how friendship can be a method, and mention a number of considerations for researchers when working closely with others. One of their recommendations when initiating this level of interaction with a large group of participants is "the need for researcher self-care when it gets to be 'too much'" (p. 283). As an intimate insider moving alongside the women, I experienced intense moments while quite literally twisting my body into shapes that could accommodate the research (Pavlidis & Olive, 2014). As a woman who cares very deeply for others, I found it incredibly important to remind myself that I could not be everything for everyone. At times, I was overly extending myself to accommodate for 19 women, and in these times, I needed to reflect on how I could care for myself as an equally important participant in this research. In hindsight, and after much considered effort, I am proud of the ways that I was able to move through this research and foster mutually fruitful relationships with the women.

## **Researcher reflexivity**

This feminist embodied ethnography demanded my complete immersion as an intimate insider (Pavlidis & Olive, 2014). The associated findings that arise out of this process illustrate how the embodiment of practice can present the opportunity to gather much richer understandings of physical cultures. Reflecting on my experiences as a dedicated Yoga practitioner and teacher in the community gave me unique insights into the feel of Yoga and the power dynamics present in this community. Both of these aspects are described below.

Many embodied researchers mention how immersing in similar movement practices to the participants in a study is important as it enables more nuanced insights that arise through personal corporeal experiences (Barbour, 2011; Buckingham & Degen, 2012; Crossley, 2007; Popovic, 2012; Smith, 2007; Thorpe, 2012a; Throsby, 2013). My embodied understandings of Yoga facilitated rich descriptions in findings (Field-Springer, 2019; Tracy, 2010). When the women were sharing their embodied moments,

my personal experiences in similar situations enabled me to connect on a deeper level with comfort. Discussing the women's experiences in Yoga included topics that were, at times, transcendent and/or esoteric. Having longstanding experience embodying Yoga in a variety of alternative communities, I was able to engage in these conversations with authenticity.

Being an intimate insider in this research helped me to connect with the women through similar embodied experiences, however, there are also issues related to this researcher role. As a woman deeply involved in the Yoga community, I took considered efforts to recognise cultural norms and gain awareness around attributes that are stereotypically yogic (Pavlidis & Olive, 2014). Speaking softly, giving hugs and choosing kind words are aspects of myself that are indicative of years crafting my behaviours while immersed in the Yoga community. Before this project, I was unaware of the extent that Yoga's cultural norms were influencing my behaviours. This presented me with a lot of opportunity to reflect and question my assumptions.

Interestingly, to amend for these 'blind spots' I found myself moving amongst different physical cultures to gain insight into what makes the Yoga culture unique. Becoming more involved in boxing, high intensity interval workouts, mountain biking, skateboarding, various dance communities (hip-hop, interpretive) illustrated how the attitudes, choices and movements in these cultures differed from those that are stereotypically yogic. There are particular ways of being and moving alongside Yoga practitioners that demonstrate 'yogic' qualities. Swearing, going to rock gigs and drinking wine are not typically yogic. I became more aware of this as the research progressed and began to both question and challenge what constitutes a 'good' yogi (this discussion is expanded in Chapter Four).

My insider status, my position in the community, and my embodied Yoga practices shared in studio settings, exposed the hierarchies and power structures that I was benefitting from in Yoga. Being a Yoga teacher with many years of experience, a practitioner with an 'advanced' *āsana* practice, and pursuing a PhD in Yoga, I was awarded unique access amongst the community. I became more aware of the positions of power I was occupying as the study continued. As Thorpe (2012a) notes, we can not escape our embodied presence in the research setting. Nor can we remove ourselves



from our participant's reception of us throughout the process. Understanding others' biases towards my presence allowed me the opportunity to reflect on privilege, power and my own preferences. I began to unravel potential assumptions I was making about practitioners. Below, I offer an observation from my journal writing:

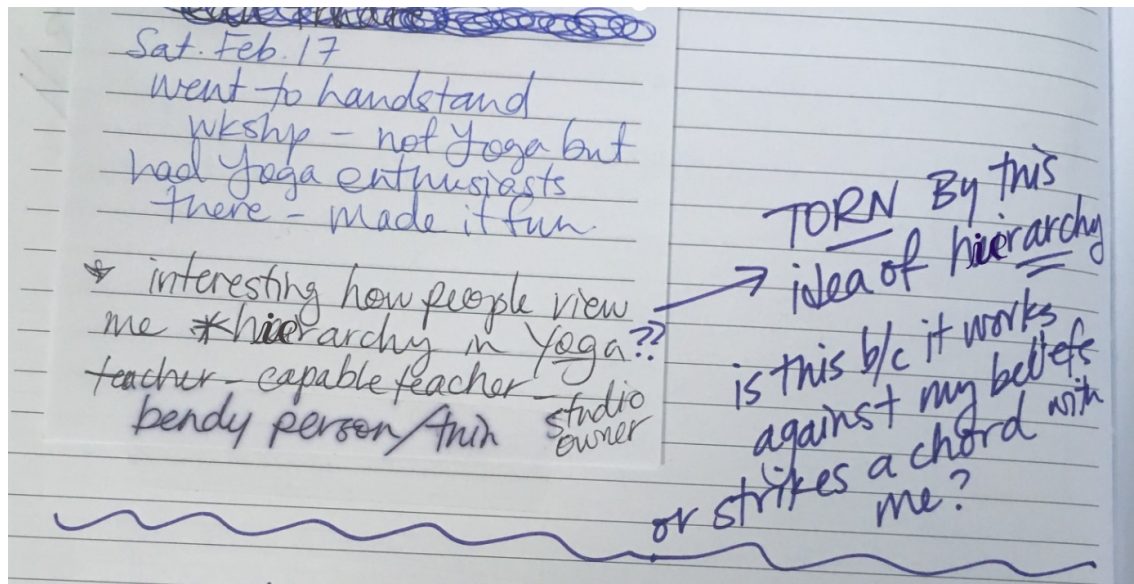


Figure 2: Research reflections

In this journal sample I am questioning the privileges that I am receiving in the Yoga community. As a young woman with a certain demeanour and body type, I am warmly welcomed to join many Yoga spaces that are not as available to those without my particular experiences and characteristics. For example, attending Wanderlust (an expensive three-day Yoga festival) as the guest of an internationally renowned Yoga teacher was a privilege I was able to enjoy due to my unique placement in the community. Throughout the process of this research, I was grateful for the access I was granted. My insider status allowed me to gather a range of information on varied experiences, but in hindsight, I am conflicted by this acceptance.

Although I am stating that I am researching as an 'intimate insider,' I acknowledge that my position in this research is multi-faceted. As Wheaton (2002) found, through her ethnographic research on a windsurfing community, her "multiple and shifting roles and identities" (p. 241) were much more complex and fluid than her original assumptions of occupying an 'insider' role as a 'gendered' subject. She found that in moving amongst

this physical culture, she could recognise the range of identities and power relations present in the community. As such, I reflect on an aspect of my identity that contributed to my 'difference' in the Waikato Yoga community.

As stated, I am an intimate insider in this research as an experienced practitioner and teacher, and I am also a foreigner as a Canadian living in Aotearoa/New Zealand. At times, this outsider status additionally gave me privileges and opportunities to learn. In some instances where I misunderstood the dynamics between the various cultures living in Aotearoa/New Zealand, the women patiently took the time to describe nuances in their culture that I was unaware of as a Canadian. However, this aspect of my identity may have prevented me from gaining full access and/or understanding of the entire range of Yoga in the Waikato and the ways that these communities have evolved over time.

Reading Tilley's (2017) description of the historical development and current evolution of Yoga in Te-Whanganui-a-Tara/Wellington helped me to gain an understanding of the length of time that Yoga has been practiced in this country and the range of ways that Yoga has evolved in this context. During this project, I also attended a year-long beginner course in Te Reo Māori (Māori language) to begin gaining insight into the unique cultural landscape of Aotearoa/New Zealand. I took considered efforts to learn as much as possible so that, when faced with conversations around cultural norms, I could listen and comprehend with more sensitivity.

As a feminist ethnographer, continual reflection through my research journal, alongside a number of other techniques (as I describe below), enabled me to examine the complex dynamics of power and access in Yoga. As Barad (2007) suggests, researcher subjectivity is always entangled amongst the process of knowing and being in the research setting. Embodied and entangled, the researcher is unable to step outside the research to objectively observe and reflect. In this ethnography, I used my self-reflections to consider the ways that I was influencing the findings throughout this process of inquiry. In my attempts at reflexivity, I critically examined both the research process and my place amongst it (Clark, 2020; Pillow, 2010). In an entry from my research journal, I critically discuss reflexivity, and like academics before me (Pillow, 2003; Pringle & Thorpe, 2017), question the extent to which I am able to fully see

myself in any situation:

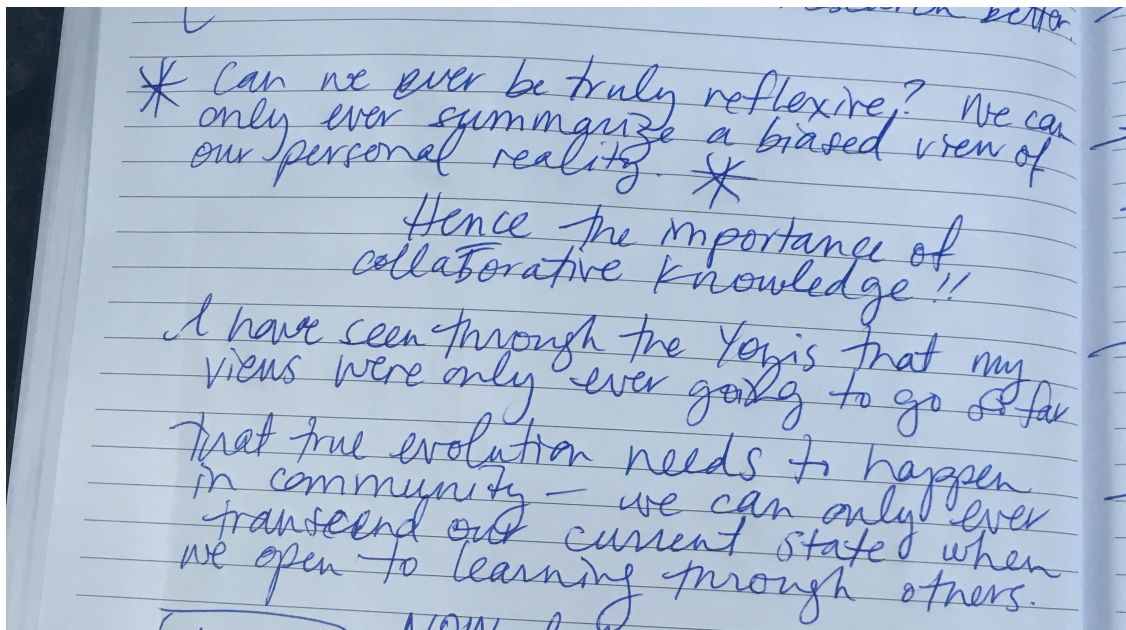


Figure 3: Reflexivity journal.

After this journal entry, I began to expand the methods I was engaging with to provide myself with a wider variety of opportunities for reflexivity. I moved beyond my research journal and began to throw myself into other situations where I could challenge my assumptions and sense of self. My process of reflexivity took on many forms and included attending a weekend sweat lodge, multiple trainings with respected teachers, meditation retreats, singing bowl healing sessions and Yoga festivals. I participated in early mornings of 108 sun salutations, ecstatic dance afternoons and weekly classes with Yoga teachers in various disciplines. Continually monitoring my intentions and actions throughout this research in multi-faceted ways (journaling, conversing, moving, singing) helped me to maintain curiosity and humility throughout this study. Placing priority on being completely honest and open about both my lack of understanding and my willingness to learn opened this project into a space where it could soften and grow.

## Representing entangled and embodied insights

Arising out of auto, sensory, ethnographic, phenomenological and narrative methods, feminist researchers are utilising creative writing and innovative methodologies to provide nuanced, complex representations of moving bodies in contemporary physical

cultures (Barbour, 2011; Bost, 2016; Francombe, 2013; Pink, 2015; Popovic, 2012; Throsby, 2013). Engaging in different ways to write through theory and lived experience, this work contributes to a growing body of literature that challenges the hierarchy of traditional Western theory and a certain style of writing to consider how corporeal knowledges can be presented in creative ways (Barbour, 2018b; Bost, 2016; Kaufmann, 2017; Popovic, 2012). Though this thesis follows a relatively traditional model, I demonstrate my interest in gaining insight through entangling sources and disrupting authority in knowledge acquisition through the ways that I represent findings. This research considers how a range of knowledge sources that are both human and non-human can all contribute to increasing understandings of lived experiences for women dedicating themselves to Yoga lifestyles. I draw inspiration from Kaufmann's (2017) critical discussion on theory:

Theory is a story we tell ourselves, a narrative structure saturated with an apparition of power. This ghostly power is not inherent to theory, but emerges in intra-action, an interaction wherein all material in the phenomenon are agentic in their relations. When a researcher and a Western theory intra-act, a ghostly power emerges. A researcher, an ego, a desire, a theoretical discourse, a logic, an entanglement emerge an apparition of power, a density of thought delete of life. (p. 423)

In this thesis, I grapple with locating ways to articulate entangled experiences drawing upon insights from the women's embodied ways of knowing, feminist theory and Yoga philosophy. There are many challenges that the qualitative researcher is presented with when attempting to use language to describe experiences that are complex. This representational struggle has filled the contents of many critical articles (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Lather & St. Pierre, 2013; MacLure, 2010, 2013; Somerville, 2016). Rethinking ways that I might be able to illustrate the material-discursive entanglements of theory alongside the women's embodied experiences through written language, demanded consideration of the ways that I was working with empirical material. In this research, the methods for analysis employed and the representation styles I engaged with were chosen with care.

## *Analysis*

Allowing deep, embodied insights to surface through messy, complex methods required modes of analysis that could mirror my desire to allow for an entangled becoming of knowledge. While it may have been easier to place transcripts into a computer program that could locate themes, it felt disingenuous to claim complexity and messiness then place the women's insights into a coded, computer program. Choosing to reflect the messy, lived experiences of the women practitioners through to the analysis of material acquired demanded a complex process that could allow for flexibility and a cumulation of learning over time (Feely, 2019).

This work utilises thematic analysis and is inspired by feminist scholars writing on post-qualitative inquiry (Braun & Clarke, 2006, Braun, Clarke & Weate, 2016; Fullagar, 2017; Lather & St. Pierre, 2013; St. Pierre, 2014, 2019). A thematic analysis can provide flexibility in the process of inquiry and complexity in research findings, when combined with post-qualitative styles of inquiry there is a potential to build work that is creative and innovative. Braun and Clarke (2006) state that good thematic analysis can, at times, present as a “poorly ‘branded’ method” when compared to other forms of analysis like grounded theory and narrative (p. 6). Therefore, in order to add rigour to this discussion, I describe how I engaged with this method as part of an inquiry that dialogued between embodied responses and thematic coding as equally influential aspects of an entangled analytic process.

I began my process of thematic analysis by searching for patterns and was not bound by theoretical frameworks. Rather, I was inspired by my philosophical understanding of both Yoga and feminisms whilst searching for themes across the breadth of empirical material. In this research, ‘themes’ were initially defined as concepts that were being similarly described by the majority of women. Over time, after continually immersing amongst a number of dominant themes, I noticed multiple sub-themes within the broader insights I was gathering. In some instances, I took the opportunity to engage deeply in a sub-theme to gain rich detail on an interesting aspect contained within a broader theme.

Searching for themes, I was utilising by what Braun and Clarke (2006) describe as an “inductive thematic analysis” (p. 12). My thematic analysis was not driven by pre-

existing coding frameworks nor was it motivated by analytic preconceptions. In my process of learning, I immersed myself within the empirical material to allow the women's experiences to guide my discoveries. Their insights inspired me to consider which feminist theories could help to articulate their insights.

Inspired by recent post-qualitative research, I challenged normalised methods of analysis through a process that matched the dynamism of life itself (Fullagar 2017; Pillow, 2015a; St. Pierre, 2014). To this end, I spent numerous hours on the floor sorting themes in various ways trying to make sense of the huge range of empirical material gathered. In working with "latent themes" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 13) I spent a considered amount of time uncovering broad meanings contained beyond what was said to examine underlying aspects of the lived experience that were contributing to each insight.

This process demanded engagement within the material, reading transcripts multiple times, writing reflections, searching for connections beyond words and paying attention to nuanced details that could build upon themes and expose assumptions over time (Fullagar, 2017; Pillow, 2015a). The phases I engaged with throughout my research process resemble those described by Braun and Clarke (2006). In addition to their description of thematic analysis, this research features phases of inquiry as ongoing and cumulative (see Appendix 12). The phases of going over and rediscovering new depth amongst themes was a process that continued over this entire ethnography. Allowing the research the opportunity to expand over time illustrates my philosophical understanding of life as a continual becoming. My understandings evolved in response to new information acquired over the length and breadth of this research.

Up to this point, my thematic analysis and the use of Braun and Clarke (2006) indicate a human-centric and interpretive/critical paradigmatic approach to analysis. Connecting to my previous discussion around paradigmatic tensions, I acknowledge the difficulty in referencing post-qualitative approaches and posthuman theory as a human researcher engaging in embodied ethnography. It is impossible to escape my human form, however, in thinking creatively about my entanglement as a material aspect of this inquiry I began to question my engagement with the empirical material alongside various theoretical lenses. My analysis of findings began within a reasonably structured (albeit messy)

analytical process. However, in the final stages of analysis, I began to lean into my embodied experiences as aspects of the research that were becoming entangled with the findings. This additional aspect of my analysis enabled me to access further depth in the empirical material. Inspired by MacLure (2010, 2013a, 2013b) I included my embodied and affective responses as influential components contributing to the analysis process. It was my continual engagement with the empirical material through both thematic coding and embodied response that helped inform my theoretical choices and representation of findings.

### ***‘Bodily intensities’ and insights that ‘glow’***

Common in ethnographic studies, this research produced a large amount of empirical material for analysis. The insights gathered from the women are multi-faceted and fascinating. Deciding which insights to reveal and which to leave behind was a difficult process. After reaching the extent of thematic analysis through methods inspired by language and coding, I began engaging with the empirical material differently (MacLure, 2013a). I became curious as to what extent varying intensities of affect might be able to contribute to decisions related to findings. My initial process of coding themes proved essential as it enabled me to fully immerse myself amongst the empirical material. However, it was my entanglement with both theory and experience as a continual process of becoming that enabled the analysis of this research to expand in ways that I did not anticipate.

MacLure (2013a) describes how a slow process of continual inquiry can allow “bodily intensities to surge up into thought and decision making” (p. 172). Further, she suggests that “these gut feelings point to the existence of embodied connections with other people, things and thoughts, that are far more complex than the static connections of coding” (MacLure, 2013a, p. 172). Acknowledging my bodily responses to both themes and theories chosen when analysing empirical material inspired potent articulations of findings.

When writing discussion chapters, I continually found myself returning to a recommendation from MacLure (2010, 2013b) encouraging researchers to engage with “the materiality of language itself” (MacLure, 2013, p. 658). Below, MacLure (2010) offers a description of findings that stimulate emotional, embodied responses:

One way to describe its beginnings would be as a kind of *glow*: some detail – a fieldnote fragment or video image – starts to glimmer, gathering our attention...The shifting speeds and intensities of engagement with the example do not just prompt thought, but also generate sensations resonating in the body as well as the brain – frissons of excitement, energy, laughter, silliness. (MacLure, 2010, p. 282)

As I wrote the discussion chapters, I kept MacLure's recommendations in mind and continually reflected on which insights were igniting an affective reaction in my body. I reflected on "glow" (MacLure, 2010, p. 282) moments and allowed my process of analysis and representation of findings to be an ongoing construction of moments where I noticed excitement, nausea, hesitation, fear and wonder.

MacLure (2013a) describes letting go of relying solely on cerebral techniques for analysis and suggests that including the discomfort of affective experience has the potential to reveal subtleties in findings. She writes, "recognising the potential for wonder in the work of coding might therefore allow some temporary point of indecision on the threshold of knowing, from which something unexpected might issue" (MacLure, 2013a, p. 181). In this research, my embodied responses became an instrumental component of my analysis and helped to produce a creative, intimate, nuanced thesis. It was my ongoing process of analysis as both cerebral and affective that enabled me to reconceptualise Yoga lifestyles in unexpected ways.

## **Summary**

This methodology chapter began with an overview of the varying debates that surround both paradigmatic approaches and qualitative structures to locate expansive and critical ways that feminist scholars are inquiring into the lived experiences of women in movement cultures. In understanding how these methods have been previously applied, I am able to identify how I am working with similar methodological structures but am adapting my design and process in innovative ways to suit this project.

As such, I have found value in dialoguing between the embodied philosophical principles of Yoga alongside contemporary theories of feminisms. Developing an



entangled ethnographic study, I acknowledge how ontology, epistemology and ethics are combining and working together to facilitate an inquiry that values union (ontology), embodied ways of knowing (epistemology) and care (ethics). The particular entanglements, decided upon at the beginning of this project, expanded and shifted over the course of this ethnography (the evolution of these entanglements is discussed in the conclusion of this thesis). Although original entanglements changed, my initial decision to work amongst the practices of Yoga and principles of feminisms remained consistent throughout.

In the coming pages, I offer findings that arose out of this entangled ethnographic work on women's contemporary Yoga lifestyles. The most prominent themes found throughout this process of continual analysis were: Yoga lifestyles as continual journeys, yogic union as entanglement and everyday ethical acts contributing to affirmative becomings. The three empirical chapters that follow offer the women's experiences embodying Yoga alongside contemporary feminist literature. These findings challenge limiting, hegemonic definitions of Yoga lifestyles and expand upon current feminist research in new materialisms, physical cultures, and contemporary lifestyles.

## Chapter Four: Journeys in contemporary Yoga lifestyles

\*

*It's Saturday morning.*

*I have decided to drive up to Auckland early in the morning to take in a class at this new studio that I have heard tons about. I occasionally come up to the city to gain inspiration for my personal practice. It's always nice to have a day away and experience a range of different teachers and studios.*

\*

*I arrive at the studio and there is a line up at the front desk so I take the opportunity to peek into the practice room...it's a long thin room with mirrors down one wall.*

*The design elements are minimalist and very chic.*

*Looking to the far end of the room, I notice the wall that I have seen in dozens of photos promoting the studio. I can see why people like coming here, it is quite luxurious.*

\*

*I pay for my class and place my mat as discreetly as possible.*

*As the room begins to fill up, rows are starting to take shape.*

*Three long lines of mats all facing the mirror. As more and more students enter the practice space, I am required to shimmy closer towards the middle of the room.*

*Only centimeters separate myself from the mat next to me. After much wiggling around to make space for more practitioners, I find myself front and center of the class (normally a position that makes me very uncomfortable, but there is no option today).*

*I close my eyes and try to turn my attention inwards, but there is too much excitement in the space. The class is expanding to beyond 50 students and a gentle beat is playing in the background. I decide to open my eyes, stay present in this moment, and take in my surroundings.*

\*

*Looking around the room, the lack of diversity is immediately apparent.*

*Though the class is filling to capacity, most of the practitioners are women and I can't help feeling as though each could be a carbon copy of the other.*

*The range of bodies and styles are extremely limited.*

*They are all young, thin and wearing various brands of luxury athletic apparel consisting of tights and bra tops of varying designs (all displaying their toned mid-ribs).*

*I feel as though I am in an advertising campaign...*

*I close my eyes and try to turn inwards again. I begin counting my breathing to try to distract my mind from the range of socio-cultural critiques of fitness cultures and Yoga bodies that are exploding in my brain...*

\*

*The music changes and the voices in the room go silent.*

*I blink open my eyes and take note of the teacher entering the room.*

*She introduces herself, invites us to sit comfortably, then begins a dharma talk.<sup>16</sup>  
The talk is eloquently crafted and weaves through both ancient yogic mythology and contemporary Yoga teachings to discuss working with the ego.*

*I am struck by the contradictions facing me in this juxtaposition of contemporary and ancient worlds... Here we are, a group of potentially amateur Yoga models, about to enter an extremely challenging physical practice, listening to stories of ancient India. We are nodding our heads, contemplating wrestling with egocentrism whilst face-to-face with our physical form in front of a huge mirror....*

\*

*The irony of the topic in this situation does not escape me, and yet, the teacher is delivering a very captivating talk and I find myself joining in with the others, nodding along, thinking about my upcoming practice and how I might be able to keep my ego in check while watching my body move into shapes for 90 minutes...*

\*

*Practice begins and the teacher expertly guides the class, weaving together Yoga philosophy with extremely advanced backbending. I keep my eyes shut as often as possible and am really enjoying the opportunity to move amongst a large group of people all breathing and sharing space.*

*It feels quite powerful.*

*After (seemingly endless) flowing sequences we finally move to the floor and make our way to savasana, I let out a huge sigh and feel my body unravelling...*

\*

*I can sense the teacher near me, she gently brings her hands to my neck and adjusts my head while massaging a powerful smelling balm into my skin. In this moment, I forget the hoards of Yoga models that surround me and I am able to enjoy the benefits of practice just lying here experiencing my breathing, feeling my body softening,*

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<sup>16</sup> The term ‘dharma talk’ is in reference to Buddhism and the tradition of Buddhist monks giving public sermons on various philosophical topics. Some Yoga teachers use the term ‘dharma talk’ when offering insights around Yoga philosophy that can help to provide an intention for a movement practice.

*focusing my attention on my sensory experience.*

*I am reminded why I practice amongst all of these conflicting messages.*

*The feel of Yoga always keeps me coming back for more.*

✱

Throughout this chapter, I discuss contemporary Yoga lifestyles and follow women Yoga practitioners as they enter into, sustain and question their decisions while navigating multiple sources of knowledge that are at the same time material and discursive, ancient and contemporary. The above vignette is presented with the intention of demonstrating the range of conflicting experiences present in a Yoga lifestyle. The women of this study (myself included) are continually faced with the juxtaposition of embodying Yoga as a spiritual practice for increasing self-awareness, as situated in a world that, in contemporary times, has benefitted from Yoga as a commercial enterprise (Miller, 2016; White, 2012).

Engaging feminist fitness, healthy, sporting and neoliberal lifestyle literature, I present and reflect on the reasons that the women of this study are continually choosing to dedicate themselves to living Yoga lifestyles. This brings me to extend upon my definition of ‘lifestyle’ as personal choices led by commonly held values that are guiding behaviours in a culture (Stebbins, 1997). Through this discussion, I consider the multiple influences, both ancient and contemporary, that are contributing to the women’s decisions around Yoga lifestyle practices. In presenting their journeys in Yoga, I locate methods that the women employ as they move alongside a range of conflicting messages that can, at times, be both spiritual and commercial.

In this chapter, I understand the women’s journeys navigating lifestyle choices as cumulative and multi-faceted. Their decision-making processes highlight how the women are finding pathways through sources that are both ancient and contemporary, internal and external, spiritual and commercial and all mutually influencing their decisions. The women’s journeys in Yoga lifestyles demonstrate ongoing processes that are in perpetual motion responding to changes they experience over time. Acknowledging the range of ages and stages of life alongside Yoga lifestyle practices, I consider how pathways are complex, ongoing and sustained by commonly held values. I begin this chapter with a discussion on the concept of a ‘lifestyle.’

## Understanding lifestyles

In Chapter One, I described how I am conceptualising lifestyles as continual attempts towards aligning daily practices to the values that are most important amongst particular cultures. I continued to discuss how the lifestyles of Yoga practitioners, in particular, are informed by sources that are both ancient and contemporary. In the literature review chapter, I mentioned the continued relevance of the *Yoga sūtras of Patañjali* and the influence that this classical Yoga text has on today's practitioners. I also made reference to the ways that feminist scholars are working with the term lifestyle to understand power and gender in societies that are greatly influenced by neoliberal aims of achievement and success (Gill & Orgad, 2018; Markula, 2014; Wheaton, 2010).

Below, I present the women's journeys in Yoga lifestyles to illustrate how they are maneuvering amongst contemporary societies and continually adapting their Yoga lifestyles. Here, I follow along with the women as they engage with Yoga teachings, get lost, found, and bewildered, amongst practices that encourage an ongoing process of self-inquiry. The contemporary women Yoga practitioners I worked with are dedicated to living a Yoga lifestyle. As they maintain various practices including meditation, *āsana* and *prāṇāyāma*, they are continually giving themselves moments in their day where they are turning inwards and attempting to increase self-awareness.

In lifestyle sport research, women's everyday decisions are defined as choices that demonstrate similar attitudes, dispositions and expressions (Wheaton, 2010). The culture that surrounds Yoga is similar to other sporting lifestyle cultures as described by Wheaton (2010). "Stereotypes about who a yogi is, what a yogi looks like, and how a yogi moves are consumed not just by yogis but increasingly by the general populace" (Miller, 2016, p. 9). However, through this chapter I highlight how women practitioners who are living alongside these practices for a long period of time are less likely to be living as 'good' yogis and more often prioritise lifestyle decisions that are personally meaningful over those that are externally validated.

Though dedicated practitioners are choosing lifestyle practices that encourage personal inquiry, their journeys in Yoga lifestyles remain influenced by the conditions that surround the culture of Yoga. Godrej (2017) has suggested that the decision to adopt a Yoga lifestyle may be seen as an alternative choice amidst other sporting, fitness and

self-actualisation regimes. However, promoting Yoga lifestyles as healthy alternatives that contain the potential for self-actualisation can be compared to neoliberal aims of building autonomous, self-governing lifestyles that ultimately bring success (Markula, 2014). In this sense, the pressures of self-maximisation through lifestyle choices remain, even though the discursive formations of ideal selves may be labelled as personally transformative in Yoga culture.

This notion of an endpoint of personal success and/or an idealised enlightenment presents a goal that is always seemingly out of reach and requires continual self-monitoring amongst unreasonable standards (McRobbie, 2015; Rottenberg, 2018). Thinking of lifestyles as pathways that lead to liberation may set increasingly challenging goals for women when adopted across the entirety of a life. As Markula (2014) suggests, many women may struggle with themes of neoliberal self-governance in fitness cultures, and similarly, also struggle in maintaining Yoga lifestyles. Further, although health and fitness lifestyles may refer to self-maximisation in relation to the body, in Yoga lifestyles there are the additional pressures of making choices that are conscious, ethically-informed and consistently observed throughout the entirety of daily life (Fullagar, 2002; Markula, 2014).

This chapter weaves through academic literature on lifestyles while following alongside the women's embodied experiences in Yoga. Cultivating self-awareness amongst complex, entangled worlds, the women of this study are building lives that are increasingly informed by their individual and embodied experiences in Yoga. From the outside of this unique contemporary culture, it could appear that the women immersed within this world are driven by similar healthism and consumerist ideologies. However, throughout this chapter I reveal that after living a Yoga lifestyle for a longer period of time the women place priority on increasing self-awareness. Through their varied lifestyles I find common threads, not in the ways that they are maintaining a certain body type or keeping up with capitalist agendas, but in the similar embodied values they return to when considering their choices in daily life. This finding is informed by the women and built over the course of this discussion.

## Adopting Yoga lifestyles

Following the women's journeys in Yoga lifestyles highlights the ways that these contemporary practitioners are continually dedicating their lives to the teachings of Yoga. Initially, I present the women's voices as they reflect on the reasons they were first inspired to commit to Yoga practices as a lifestyle. Further, insights from women with varied personal histories at different ages and stages of life helps to provide a broader understanding of the unique pressures of being a woman and committing to Yoga over a lifetime.

Many of the women in this study were initially drawn to Yoga through physical *āsana* practices in studio settings. Given the prevalence of Yoga imagery and visual focus in popular culture on physical activity, this is understandable (Cowans, 2016; Markula, 2014; Miller, 2016). However, the physical practice of Yoga was not what necessarily inspired them to deepen their commitment and eventually build lifestyles around cultural principles. When asked about what inspired them to inquire more deeply into the practices of Yoga, the vast majority of the women attributed their decisions to moments of peace, ease and internal reflection. As busy, high-performing women living in demanding, fast-paced environments, many of the practitioners mentioned the relief they felt in their first classes and understood Yoga to be different from other movement practices. Below I offer a quote from Winifred. She is describing her first experience in Yoga and how this moment enticed her to see Yoga as a movement practice that could facilitate self-inquiry:

*Yoga was introduced to our dance company that I was involved in almost thirty years ago. Our director got a Yoga teacher in on Tuesday nights. I mean, we were all dancers and so we could all do the moves and would just sort of throw our bodies around. But I remember loving the grace and the slowness and the quiet of it. When I look back, I remember the feeling that sort of attached me to Yoga was that – while it was a movement discipline – and that's certainly how Yoga was initially presented to me, not so much chanting and anything else, but a movement discipline...but even still, in that first class I understood that while dance is a movement discipline, Yoga was different...it wasn't for the sake of performing to give*

*to other people. It (Yoga) was this private journey and I think that is what really got me like – ohhh this is actually a journey inward, this is not for anyone else's approval. And I must have intuitively been drawn to that.*  
(Winifred)

Winifred expresses a sentiment shared by many of the women upon experiencing Yoga for the first time. In contrast with many movement practices, like performative dance and competitive sport, Yoga offered the women a space where they could have time to themselves. In their initial experiences in Yoga, many of the women mentioned the importance of experiencing Yoga as a practice that was not based on external approval but on internal reflection.

In Barbour, Clark and Jeffrey's article (2019), the authors discuss how freedom in movement amongst intergenerational groups of women in non-judgemental spaces may influence women's experiences of wellbeing throughout their daily lives. The women in this study similarly mentioned how, through early experiences of Yoga, they were given the opportunity to connect with themselves. These initial experiences of turning attention inwards allowed them to reflect on their experiences. It was the initial experiences of calm and connection in Yoga that opened the women to the possibility that movement and life could be different.

For many of the women in my research, the entry point into a Yoga lifestyle began with movement classes that allowed them a space where they could remove themselves from the stressors of their busy lives. Many of the women began practicing Yoga as young adults and in these early years, they experienced a large contrast between the moments of peace they experienced in Yoga when compared to their daily work-life environments. As Jyoti mentions below, after experiencing ease in Yoga, she committed to Yoga lifestyle principles and changed many aspects of her life:

*I went for my initial trial class. Afterwards, I felt this sense of peace that I had never felt before. I just felt so peaceful. And it was such a contrast to the life I was living. At that time, I had a really bad lifestyle. I partied a lot and was doing marketing for a big hotel chain...all of this was impacting my health. It started getting so bad that my hair was falling out. I had 50*



*cent coin gaps all around my head and I was going to the hospital regularly to get injections so that my hair would grow back. After two months of doing my Yoga teacher training my hair stopped falling out. I stopped going to the hospital to get steroids put into my head. And that's when I signed up for the Yoga therapy training with my guru – that's how it all started. I resigned from my job, I left my relationship, I stopped smoking and I committed myself to the practices of Yoga. (Jyoti)*

There are many aspects of Jyoti's experiences along her journey that are worthy of a lengthy discussion and all relate to previous lifestyle literature around neoliberal pressures for women and narratives around Yoga as medicine (Kauer, 2016; Markula, 2014; Rottenberg, 2018). Jyoti, like many of the women in this study, saw Yoga as a lifestyle practice that could bring healing through lifestyle changes. This idea may be problematic as the tendency to consider Yoga teachings and teachers as external 'saviours' has the potential to cause practitioners to forfeit individual autonomy, placing knowledge around healing in the hands of an external authority (Tichenor, 2007; Wildcroft, 2018). The influence of external knowledges and yogic authority is discussed in further detail throughout this chapter. At this point in the discussion, I wish to highlight the extreme differences many of the women mentioned when comparing their daily working lives before Yoga to their present Yoga lifestyles. Adopting a Yoga lifestyle for Nutmeg brought her to live on the other side of the world in a small surfing town. Below, she compares her lifestyles before and after Yoga:

*When I started Yoga I was working at a trust fund company for billionaires. I'd workout, go to Yoga, do all this running around town and not sleep. I bartended in the summers. Some summers I was based on a boat in the harbour. And so I was going non-stop. I would go to bed at like 3 in the morning, wake up and go do it all over again. When I think back, I'm like, did I over do it? You know what I mean? Like, maybe going so extreme made me want to look for something totally different. Because now I'm living this Yoga lifestyle that is totally different, and it's pretty awesome. I can take naps (laughs)...and I can go to Yoga when I like. I go for runs, go to the beach, visit with friends, it's a totally different way of living. (Nutmeg)*

Like Nutmeg, many of the women mentioned that (prior to adopting Yoga lifestyles) they were living extremely busy and stressful lives. As young women entering adulthood and learning to survive in fast-paced, competitive environments, many of the women mention how demonstrating the ability to cope amongst today's neoliberal and capitalist landscape was providing them with cultural capital (James, 2015). Though they may have externally appeared to be managing unreasonable extremes and 'flourishing' by contemporary standards (Keyes, 2002), many described simultaneously experiencing extreme mental and/or physical discomfort alongside their busy schedules. It could be assumed that many of the women were searching for calming practices as they were facing unreasonably high demands while attempting to balance the multifaceted lives they were living (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Van den Broeck, Vansteenkiste, De Witte, & Lens, 2008).

Importantly, as practices that value self-awareness and personal reflection, continued attendance in Yoga classes encouraged the women to begin noticing their discomforts and prompted them to consider adopting different values that might encourage changes in their lifestyle choices. Initially, many of the women were looking for a practice that could bring balance in their busy (at times, overwhelming) lived experiences. Below, Tara reflects on her initial motivations to attend hot Yoga classes:

*I went to a few (Yoga) classes and then it was party on. I didn't really go to Yoga at all and then oh – what happened, I'm trying to remember my life (giggles)...I think my next real memory of practice was being in London and going to a gym. I used to be a real gym bunny and I loved doing the hot Yoga. I was a bit of a party animal and I liked to do quite an extreme kind of raging. Like, I'd start on Friday and finish Monday morning. Just rage hard out. And then mid-week I'd go to a hot Yoga class and I felt like I was detoxing. (Tara)*

Tara mentions using Yoga, initially, as a way to 'detox' after partying. However, as time continued, her motivations changed. Similar to many of the women in this study, after maintaining her dedication to Yoga practices as opportunities for continual self-reflection, Tara began to value different daily practices. Currently, Tara lives remotely and works with horses and although she still describes herself as a 'bit of a rebel,' her

commitment to Yoga throughout her daily life has contributed to many lifestyle changes.

Contrary to guidebooks recommending Yoga lifestyles of restraint, the women of this study do not necessarily exclude parties, become disciplined practitioners and ultimately reach an endpoint of enlightenment through a linear process (Cowans, 2016). Rather, their experiences in Yoga lifestyles reflect nuanced lives that are always in a state of motion. Below, I offer Aurora's journey to demonstrate that remaining dedicated to her Yoga lifestyle practices required continual self-reflection amongst multiple layers of conditioning. As a competitive swimmer and marketing executive, Aurora knows about the challenges of pushing through pain and dedicating long hours to deadlines in efforts to achieve amongst unreasonable demands. Similar to many of the women in this study, it was dealing with physical illness that prompted Aurora to investigate Yoga lifestyle practices.

Today, Aurora remains immersed amongst an extremely busy life. As a marketing executive managing a demanding working life and as a mother in a blended family with a newborn, Aurora is working tireless hours under stressful conditions and with little sleep. However, through Yoga she has shifted many of her eating and movement patterns to manage physical illness. Not all of the women drastically altered the external conditions of their lives. Though Aurora acknowledges the importance of her Yoga lifestyle practices in keeping her well, she further admits that it is a challenge trying to maintain practices of Yoga alongside a demanding and fast-paced life:

*I'm very aware now that I'm the person that will get very 'yes, yes, yes, I'll take it all on!' And then I implode because it's unrealistic. It's the same principle I've had in the whole picture of my life. It's like, you can't go running and do this and do that...and teach tons of Yoga, and hold a job down that's 70 to 80 hours a week, and be a mother, and support family in need...you just can't do that. But I was telling myself I should be able to, and if I didn't do it, I wasn't perfect enough. So it (Yoga) has been a really good mechanism for questioning why I was forcing myself to do those things. It's given me the confidence to say no. And actually not think that I'm inadequate in asking for help or telling them that they have unreasonable expectations. Yeah, it's been a big shift for me. (Aurora)*

Aurora describes how her dedication to Yoga has increased her confidence and suggests that this, in turn, has encouraged her to stand up against unreasonable demands. Her example is important to mention because it demonstrates how Yoga practices can be woven into the fabric of lives through continual attempts to create individually meaningful lifestyles that suit multi-faceted, unique experiences. Further, it highlights the complexity of life that contemporary women are managing as they occupy multiple roles in homes alongside neoliberal expectations that promote personal responsibility for health maintenance (Clark & Thorpe, 2019).

As indicated by the women's experiences adopting Yoga lifestyles, personal awareness is a continual and considered aspect of daily life that the women regularly learn from, amidst continual pressures of success and achievement. The ideal of a neoliberal superwoman endlessly achieving and in complete control of her own wellbeing keeps women frustrated and over-worked (Rottenberg, 2018). This discursive formation of effortlessly managing insurmountable tasks does not go away once adopting a Yoga lifestyle. Ideas of reaching self-actualisation, as mentioned above, are equally problematic in the world of Yoga (Leledaki, 2014). However, the philosophical teachings of Yoga prioritise internal reflection, honesty and self compassion. As I will continue to describe, it is the women's repeated embodiment of practices prompting self-reflection that inspire them to make choices that are individually relevant, and changing over time.

### ***Motivations of older women***

The examples above are from women who began exploring alternative options for living through adopting Yoga lifestyles in early adulthood. Amongst the practitioners, there was another smaller group of women who began to adopt Yoga lifestyle practices during later adulthood. In Humberstone and Cutler-Riddick's (2015) article on older women's motivations for engaging in Yoga *āsana* classes, they clarify that the group of women in their study had different motivations for movement. Similarly, the older practitioners of this research offer alternate reasons for engaging in Yoga lifestyles.

These women's motivations for adopting this way of life do not necessarily revolve around large lifestyle changes after acquiring radically different understandings of their personal identities. As such, these women experienced much fewer challenges when

adopting a Yoga lifestyle. This is illustrated in the quote below from Breeze:

*There are always challenges in life. And so, it's not a particular challenge to live a yogic lifestyle...it's just another challenge and another challenge followed by another challenge. And we just try to breathe through it. Do a little meditation, do a little bit of going into the hills. Yeah. So the yogic lifestyle is not a challenge for me, it's just a nice way of being. (Breeze)*

Breeze indicates that life provides challenges in whatever lifestyle is being lived, but suggests that Yoga provides a way to manage these. For her, living with Yoga is not the challenge, it is the toolbox that is helping her to manage life. With a well-established sense of self, Breeze and the other women practitioners who entered Yoga lifestyles later, did not mention the vast differences between their daily lives prior to their transition into Yoga lifestyles. In contrast, their motivations were often inspired by the desire to immerse themselves in lifestyles that could support their interests in personal growth. These women were concerned with continuing to live in ways that promote learning and connection within like-minded communities. As Peanut mentions below, she enjoys engaging in a Yoga lifestyle as it allows her the opportunity to connect with people who are open to new ideas:

*I met with an old friend of mine the other day. And I noticed that there were areas in our conversation which I quickly learned you didn't go deeper into. Her mind was made up about certain things. But I think most people who are attempting to live as well as they are able, are very open to new ideas. They may not agree with it, but they are open. I think this is part of why I like coming to Yoga, to meet with like-minded people. (Peanut)*

Peanut was talking to me about her continued interest in Yoga as a practice that could help her to maintain her mobility in her body as well as her flexibility in her mind. She wanted to be able to continue growing and learning and saw value in being around people who thought similarly.

Women embodying Yoga as they are aging are living in ways that are not typical when compared to other women of a similar age. For example, Peanut is a practitioner in her 90s who attempts hand balances and attributes her independence to her ‘cussedness’<sup>17</sup>(Peanut). Kakini is an entrepreneur in her 50s who teaches at popular gyms around town and surfs on the weekends. In the quote below, Kakini describes how Yoga is something that keeps her connected to her world and helps her to feel that she can influence those around her by including them in, what she describes as, her ‘Yoga bubble’:

*I guess I can't stop now because I don't want to break my Yoga bubble. It's my world now. It's in there (points to heart) and in there (points to head) and helps this (points to her body and gives a little shimmy). I keep going because I want to keep the union. I don't want to burst the bubble. If I keep practicing my bubble expands. It will keep growing until it envelops the world. A worldwide Yoga bubble that we are all a part of, that's one great awareness. So I keep practicing...eventually that bubble is going to be universal. (Kakini)*

Later in this discussion, I ask Kakini what her Yoga bubble consists of and she said, “kindness.” Breeze, Kakini and Peanut mention very different motivations to continue dedicating themselves to Yoga lifestyles and these examples differ from academic research investigating aging populations in Yoga. Where some articles are researching the benefits of Yoga for balance and bodily control (Di Benedetto, Innes, Taylor, Rodeheaver, Boxer, Wright & Kerrigan, 2005), these women indicate that they are gaining further emotional and interpersonal benefits through Yoga.

All of the women in the examples above mention a range of motivations behind initiating and continuing Yoga. What unites them, and as mentioned earlier, are the women’s continued efforts at finding practices that are suitable in their lifestyles. Unlike other Yoga lifestyle literature recommending specific practices and rigid schedules (Khalsa & Cope, 2006; Yadav et al., 2012), the women’s reasons for continually dedicating themselves to Yoga practices reflect an interest in building varied lifestyles

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<sup>17</sup> In a conversation with Peanut, she confided in me that her achievements in life could be attributed to what her husband called ‘cussedness.’ She defines this as being stubborn. Based on my interactions with Peanut, I would define it as determined.

in different settings. Contrary to discursive formations around Yoga lifestyles as driven by self-realisation and elusive ‘perfect’ states of being (Leledaki & Brown, 2008), the women’s experiences indicate motivations of personal inquiry to work with the conditions they presently find themselves experiencing.

## **Navigating tensions**

There are a range of stereotypes (including some extreme stereotypes of Yoga) that are presently influencing the women’s Yoga lifestyles. The quote below by Lewis (2008) highlights some stereotypes and potential tensions to be navigated:

Yoga can be understood as a dynamic growth industry. But its relationship to capitalism is fruitful and fraught. Despite having its own celebrity entrepreneurs, fashion lines and online dating services, yoga transcends traditional theoretical assumptions about the difference between consumer culture and subculture. Yoga practitioners and students experience their practice as authentic and meaningful, even while sporting ‘hip tranquil chick’ attire and drinking artesian water imported from Fuji. (p. 541)

Though I understand that the worlds of commercialised and traditional Yoga are filled with extremely nuanced variations, I reflect on this binary distinction of ‘commercial’ and ‘traditional’ as these two worlds were often mentioned by the women of this group and regularly considered to be contradictory. Throughout this section, I reflect on the ways that the women embodying Yoga lifestyles are participating in this narrative of traditional versus commercial and also present examples where the women are experiencing tension while reflecting on these stereotypes.

The women variously discuss the ways that contemporary societies are interacting with Yoga and are equally inspired, revolted, encouraged and disappointed. Just as it seems that there is no one way to live a contemporary Yoga lifestyle, there is no one way to respond amongst such varied interpretations. Below, Tara acknowledges that she is living a Yoga lifestyle that is simultaneously moving between worlds that value restraint and consumption. Her description of the tensions she experiences while embodying Yoga highlight the multi-faceted worlds that the women are mutually

implicated within. Embodying a lifestyle that is influenced by both contemporary consumerism and traditional asceticism, Tara finds a balance:

*Yeah, so there is that extreme end of the scale of living a Yoga lifestyle. And then you've got the other kind of pseudo kind of yogi. The kind of 'not even really a yogi' type practitioner...a bit materialistic, you know? A bit like me. I can play with that idea of renouncing everything, but I quite like the idea of buying a BMW and I do like lululemon. And it's a balance really, just a consistent observing of everything happening all at once and being aware of the extremes. And maybe playing with the edge just to test the boundaries and know ourselves better. (Tara)*

Tara's experience reflects an ability to navigate her own personal definitions amidst cultures that promote allegiance to particular lifestyle practices. She describes testing her personal boundaries amidst multiple recommendations for living Yoga lifestyles. After many years of living alongside Yoga and continually reassessing their personal choices, the women of this study offer examples as longstanding practitioners who are finding pathways to freedom through potentially oppressive systems of both discipline and consumption. Both traditional and commercial Yoga influences contain the potential for practitioners to embody extreme stereotypes. Below, Uma reflects on witnessing individuals using practices of discipline in Yoga to avoid self-reflection:

*I guess growing up in a Yoga community there was a lot of almost...(pause)...taking things to the opposite extreme of Yoga. Of denying your body, and lots of fasting, and deep meditation and prayer. There are ways that those practices can be not present as well, where you're trying to push everything away. I think you can do that in everyday life and I think you can do that in a yogic life as well. (Uma)*

Uma mentions that individuals in all lifestyles can participate in avoidance techniques. She continues below, offering insight into how she is recognising her tendency to push for discipline as a form of escapism and describes how she is attempting to manage this with present moment awareness:



*For me, being present is my way of avoiding that extreme. Because I can't do that as much if I'm being aware and in the present moment. So that's my little piece that I have gleaned from all the different masters I guess. If I notice myself just pushing for that discipline, when I notice myself doing that, I just try to bring it back and listen more. (Uma)*

With a background in competitive skiing and a childhood spent living in a Yoga community, Uma described the difference between the values that are prioritised amongst Yoga versus those prioritised in sporting lifestyles and she was not alone in observing these distinctions. The women in this study who were previously involved in competitive sport (Michael, Robin, Sophie, Uma) all mentioned how beliefs in 'no pain no gain' often informed their lifestyle choices.

After many years working to unravel mental conditioning of pushing through pain, they similarly noted the difference they experienced in Yoga lifestyles as daily practices that place value on internal reflection. This idea that harder work, more sweat and extra effort will produce results (Atkinson, 2017; Markula, 2014), though still present amongst the women's decision-making processes, was ultimately not considered as important as self-reflection guiding personally meaningful choices in their continued dedication to their Yoga lifestyles.

### ***Finding inspiration in Yoga lifestyles***

As mentioned above, the women were drawn to Yoga as pathways allowing them to continually adapt and reaffirm individualised lifestyles. Through their continued commitment to Yoga as practices for increasing awareness, they are building ways of living that respond to evolving understandings of self in a mutually implicated world. I suggest that these women, in their different ways, were placing importance on the value of authenticity; revealed in the ways that the women continually find pathways through multiple recommendations for living Yoga lifestyles. Amongst various pressures, they are choosing as appropriate for themselves. As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter and through the women's examples, I find a common value that unites their lifestyles. I suggest that this value is 'authenticity.' Below, I present various uses of the word and describe how I understand authenticity within this particular context as a value that is guiding women's choices in Yoga lifestyles.

## Authenticity

Before describing how the women of this study are rethinking ‘authenticity’ in their own terms, I present the various ways that this term is being understood in both academic and yogic communities. I recognise that ‘authenticity’ is a loaded and multi-faceted term. In feminist research, considering authenticity is often associated with a discussion of power and whose voice is featured as the authentic and authoritative source of knowledge in cultural settings (Pavlidis & Olive, 2014). In an ethnographic setting, there are complications that surround the problematic positioning of researchers (as individuals in positions of power) who have historically assumed control over what is considered ‘authentic’ in the culture they are researching (Gerrard, Rudolph & Sriprakash, 2017).

Feminist cultural studies scholars have explored the discursive pressures and expectations put on women to live ‘successful’ lives in neoliberal societies (Gill & Orgag, 2018; McRobbie, 2015; Rottenberg, 2018). They have explained that authenticity can often be promoted as an unrealised personal potential that is always slightly out of reach and only accessible with the help of consumer goods (Cockerham, Rütten & Abel, 2011). Amongst healthy and neoliberal lifestyles research, the word authenticity is used in relation to branding on social media, self-governance, self-monitoring and self-regulation (Duffy & Hund, 2015; Gill & Orgad, 2018; Khamis, Ang, & Welling, 2016; Markula, 2014; Rottenberg, 2018; Webb et al., 2017). In fitness lifestyle practices, similar unrealised potentials are imagined through notions of self-actualisation and/or self-maximisation. These versions of authenticity all suggest that this quality is something that individuals must continually regulate (Leledaki, 2014; Markula, 2014). Ideas around authenticity as a potential or goal that can be attained through lifestyle modification may also be limiting.

As indicated by the examples above, authenticity is intricately connected to power. The particular negotiations of authenticity and the hierarchies of power are not formulaic, they differ within each uniquely defined cultural setting. The individuals who are given authority and authentic voice in a boxing community may greatly differ from those in positions of power in Yoga. The qualities that contribute to an individual gaining authenticity in a community are decided amongst each unique cultural setting. Therefore,

to understand the workings of power that surround ‘authentic’ voice in Yoga, it is helpful to inquire into dominant discursive formations around these topics.

Historically in Yoga, dominant discourse around authenticity connects to an idealised ancient Indian tradition that is upheld by men in positions of power (Maddox, 2015). Within yogic texts, the word ‘authentic’ is also used interchangeably with the word ‘traditional’ and this term is frequently connected to Indian lineages that are often considered more reputable amongst Yoga practitioners (Godrej, 2017; Maddox, 2015; Miller, 2016; White, 2012). Even today, with an expanding range of increasingly popular women teachers, there remains a powerful discursive formation around ‘authentic’ practice as one that is more ‘genuine’ and connects to an ancient lineage with a history of male authority (Lea, 2009). Maddox (2015) further problematises the term authenticity as used by Western practitioners involved in *Ashtanga-vinyāsa* practice who travel to Mysore, India<sup>18</sup> as a spiritual pilgrimage stating:

perceptions of authenticity that inform both the Ashtanga practice and the travel expectations of yoga tourists function to maintain Orientalist imaginings of a timeless, exotic, and mystical India defined in opposition to the materialistic and rational West. (p. 330)

Although I do not direct this discussion towards Orientalist imaginings, I am interested in the ways that the women of this study maintain this discursive formation around an ‘authentic’ Yoga practice that finds its roots in ancient India. This Yoga, frequently defined as ‘traditional,’ is often considered more ‘genuine’ in contrast with contemporary adaptations. Below, I offer three quotes that highlight how some of the women are navigating understandings of traditional styles of Yoga:

*Where is the line drawn between traditional and contemporary and is one more valid than the other? (Michael)*

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<sup>18</sup> Mysore is a city in India. It is also the name used to describe a style of *ashtanga-vinyāsa* Yoga where a memorised sequence is practiced in silence in a studio space. All practitioners work at their own level and sometimes there is a teacher present who remains mostly silent, and offers adjustments. Some students of this style make pilgrimages to the city of Mysore to practice this style at the place of its inception.

*My first teacher used to say that we were not really doing pure Yoga because we were in the commercial world. To do pure Yoga means you have to abstain yourself from external worldly things. But today we are trying to take Yoga and make it into this commercial thing. (Marina)*

*In traditional Yoga there is no running away. I just found that a lot of the Yoga today is offering the easy route out...Yoga today has become escapism. (Tara)*

The presence of a binary between ancient (traditional) versus contemporary (commercial) Yoga styles remains influential in the women's understandings of Yoga. As indicated, the women of this study remain influenced by power and authority as practitioners immersed in the culture of Yoga. However, in contrast to the findings from feminist scholars (McRobbie, 2015; Pavlidis & Olive, 2014), and contrary to discursive formations of 'authentic' practice in Yoga cultures (Godrej, 2017; Maddox, 2015; Markula, 2014), I noticed that when the women in this research used the term 'authenticity,' it was often interpreted as a principle guiding their personal lifestyle decisions. Inspired by this observation and similar to Godrej (2017), I am interested in the ways that these women's embodied experiences in Yoga lifestyles may offer counter-hegemonic formations around the term authenticity and consider how their use of this word may differ from notions of a traditional Indian lineage.

### ***Women's understandings of authenticity***

Ultimately, my decision to use the term authenticity was inspired by the way that the women were referring to this term when describing their lived experiences. In this section, I illustrate how the women are redefining authenticity in their continued attempts at locating personally meaningful applications of practice throughout their daily lives.

In our time together, I noticed that the women practitioners were using the term authenticity, not in reference to a 'traditional' practice, but more regularly to indicate a quality of integrity that they were prioritising in their Yoga lifestyles and using to guide their choices. As such, in this discussion, I choose to interpret 'authenticity' as 'finding integrity.' This is based on conversations and movement experiences shared with the

women. Similar to Markula's (2003) discussion of ethics, I realised that the women were moving from socially-defined to individually-informed translations. The women's interpretation of the word authenticity indicates a shift away from culturally-defined, power-laden authenticities and notions of an untouched traditional practice and moves towards individually relevant notions of self-awareness and maintaining personal integrity in practice.

From this point onwards, I consider ways that women are continually reconceptualising their understandings of personal authenticity (interpreted as 'finding integrity') through their continued Yoga lifestyle journeys. In this chapter, I suggest rethinking what constitutes an 'authentic' Yoga lifestyle. As informed by the women of this study, I define authenticity not as pathways towards unrealised potentials, nor as indications of a more 'genuine' way to practice, but as a value of integrity and personal awareness that informs the women's choices along their continual Yoga journeys. These authentic lifestyle choices are personally relevant and changing over time.

As illustrated through the variation in the women's Yoga lifestyles, there is no one truth in any given situation. The women of this study are continually committing to making authentic lifestyle choices and this is illustrated through the variation present in their Yoga practices. Many of the women described authenticity in practice, not as adhering to a lineage or tradition, but as the thoughtful application of Yoga teachings responding to the demands of each of their uniquely formed daily lives. Below, Tara describes the importance of practicing with authenticity in her Yoga lifestyle and compares her integrity in her practice to those that become lost in teachings:

*I just go back to what is authentic for me as a practitioner. I'm not trying to take on another version of anything, or change the teachings of Yoga, but I'm not a purist either. I mean, for me, I'm a pretty committed person. And I'm committed to my traditional Yoga path. But at the same time, I don't use it as my identity, you know what I'm saying? Am I being a bit abstract? You know, some people just lose themselves a bit. Like maybe it becomes all they identify with. And I think that can happen with people going off to India sometimes. Or seeking enlightenment and peace through*

*a certain way, and then not finding it. But assuming that they have...or pretending that they have. (Tara)*

In this quote, I interpret Tara's use of the word authentic to mean 'integrity' and 'self-awareness.' For her, these qualities are prioritised through confronting her present moments and continually reflecting on her choices. In our conversations she describes the challenges of adopting a strict Yoga practice and demonstrates courage in her continual return to the teachings of Yoga. In our many interactions, I came to appreciate that she is not afraid to critically examine and even challenge teachings (and teachers) of Yoga that she disagrees with. Tara is a practitioner who follows a Yoga lineage and attributes much of her learning to inspirational teachers. However, in moving alongside Tara and experiencing how she examines life, I recognise that she values authenticity over conformity. She does not allow the teachings to become a substitute or replacement for her established sense of self. Manaia also adheres to the value of integrity over conformity stating, "my motto for my life is to stand up and just be authentic."

After many years of engaging with Yoga, the women of this study are gaining the confidence to make personal decisions that may or may not align with 'traditional' or 'commercial' Yoga lifestyle prescriptions. Many of the women in this study remain committed to disciplined lineages and regimented Yoga lifestyles. However, as they continue to immerse themselves in these practices, they are regularly questioning their choices to ensure that their decisions around following certain teachings are supporting their experiences in life. The women's contemporary adaptations of Yoga lifestyle practices allow room for interpretation, criticality and expansion. In my discussions with the women, they regularly mentioned monitoring their motivations in attempts at making decisions driven by internalised value systems over externalised comparisons. Below, Aurora is reflecting on continually navigating her motivations in an *āsana* class:

*It's funny. I mean, you don't even realise til later on that it was just your ego telling you to do something when you don't actually have to. You know? For me, in a Yoga class there's that balance. There's a difference between thinking, 'I'm doing this pose. And I'm going deeper because I know I'm going to feel amazing afterwards. And I need to go there and release that,'*

*versus, 'I'm doing it cause I need to prove to the entire class that I can do it.'* (Aurora)

Aurora's experiences relate similarly to women facing pressures of achievement as neoliberal feminist subjects pushing to appear perfect and compete amongst unreasonable demands (McRobbie, 2015; Rottenberg, 2018). External pressures to achieve and live Yoga lifestyles of discipline were discursive formations that the women mentioned throughout their journeys. One way that the women found inspiration to maintain their personal inquiry amongst a range of conflicting teachings was through experiences with other women practitioners.

### **Gaining inspiration from women practitioners**

A continual reconceptualisation of authenticity through lifestyle choices prompted the women to locate role models that they felt could offer insight into maintaining individuality. Critical socio-cultural and historical analyses of popular Yoga imagery suggest that the presentation of women's Yoga bodies, as idealised, athletic, thin and capable, could be influencing practitioners (Markula, 2014; Miller, 2016; Vertinsky, 2012; Webb et al., 2017). While there were a number of times throughout this ethnography that the women mentioned the bodies of fellow practitioners/teachers as capable and enviable, in the same breath, these compliments were often accompanied by descriptions of the women's personal attributes. Their physical form was not the only aspect that the women admired. Below Tara reflects on the inspiration she gained from one of her first teachers:

*I found Yoga in a gym with a lady. I didn't really know much about it, but I found her very inspiring. She was very quiet and like modest, like really modest and humble, and really athletic. And the practice wasn't in your face, it was almost like she was really shy. And the teachings were very subtle, I remember that. Like, my classes with her were in the gym and I was just going through the sequence slowly, and I liked it. It hooked me, and I think she inspired me more than the actual practice at that time.*  
(Tara)

Many of the women spoke similarly of their initial experiences moving alongside women Yoga practitioners. They were inspired not only by the physical prowess of the women's bodies, but also the characteristics and assumed values that the women were embodying. There was something more than physicality in Yoga that the women were intrigued by. Below Hamsa describes some of her first women Yoga teachers:

*I remember some of my first experiences with Yoga and being taught by these incredible women. They were different from my mom or any of the women I knew. There were two that I kept going to and I remember just being amazed by them. They would both rock out intense poses like handstand and then be totally cool and calm. They were practicing with this calm confidence and they had this internal strength and I thought, I want to be like that. And if Yoga is bringing them to this...maybe I should get more into Yoga. (Hamsa)*

Hamsa saw something in these women practitioners that she deemed worthy of emulation. Although she mentions advanced postures like handstand, she also describes the teachers she valued most as those who were embodying confidence while externally appearing to remain calm. Below I offer a quote from a conversation with Peanut. We were discussing the increasing prevalence of Yoga in the world and I was wondering what she thought of this growing trend. She brought up an example of a mutual friend:

*Well of course I'm all for it. Because I think that it can become a way of life. And you look at our friend, wouldn't everybody love to be like her? Kind, relaxed, graceful, considerate, everything you could wish for. So, even if you can't reach those goals yourself...if you have somebody else to glance at...well there's a goal for you. (Peanut)*

It is interesting to consider the range of qualities that the women mention as admirable in practitioners they describe. In the quotes above, the women admire demonstrations of calm confidence, being relaxed, graceful, considerate, kind, modest, humble and strong. These attributes are not those that were previously used to describe authority figures in Yoga. Previously, yogic authority may have been granted to Indian men, but this is now extending to include women teachers in Western contexts.



Most students of Yoga mention finding inspiration in Yoga authorities, this is not a new phenomenon. In recent years, this adoration is increasingly attached to the extent that a teacher can inspire personal growth (Tichenor, 2007; Wildcroft, 2018). Today's experienced Yoga practitioners are shifting their opinions around whose voices hold authority and as such, the range of individuals with power over Yoga knowledge is expanding.

### ***Thoughts on the influence of contemporary gurus***

Many of the women of this study mention struggles as well as moments of bliss whilst adopting Yoga lifestyles. During these first years, the women's teachers greatly influenced their lived experiences whilst attempting to adopt Yoga lifestyles. In discussions about inspiration, the women offer a range experiences with teachers. While some were extremely instrumental in guiding them towards more personal awareness, not all experiences with teachers encouraged individual empowerment. Below, I discuss how old models of guru worship and male authority are shifting alongside an increasing population of women living contemporary Yoga lifestyles.

The ancient guru-disciple model of Yoga mentorship is still prevalent in the Yoga community (Griswold, 2019). Discursive formations around guru worship and placing knowledge in the hands of an external source of ultimate knowledge remain. This style of teaching reverberates themes of Orientalism and male dominance in the Yoga community (De Michelis, 2004). A number of the women reflected on experiences throughout their journeys in Yoga where they were faced with ethical decisions in learning situations with male teachers. Aurora reflects on her experience in a Yoga teaching training she attended abroad:

*I had a lot of resistance in the training I did. The teachers would try to get us into some pretty emotionally malleable states. And then they'd get us to do these exercises that were inspired by a psychologist. And...I am sure they were sound practices in a controlled, one-on-one capacity with a professional. But...these Yoga teachers were not qualified mental health practitioners. We would do these role plays where people were revealing extreme trauma and emotional distress and I was looking at the facilitators thinking...you guys are so out of your depth right now...you*

*have stirred up this hornet's nest for this person and you have no idea how much emotional trauma you are going to now trigger for them. I do not think that they should have done what they did without a proper psychologist. At one point they were getting us to share with a group of 70 participants about our deepest inner traumas. I refused to participate, I didn't think it was safe to expose myself in that environment and in that way. (Aurora)*

In our conversations, Aurora mentioned the discomfort and conflict she felt through this experience. She credited her maturity, and ability to be discerning, as important throughout her experience. She worried for the younger women in this same training who were placing their entire wellbeing in the hands of individuals who were not trained mental health professionals. Thus, it seems that issues with ancient guru pedagogies persist in contemporary Yoga (Tichenor, 2007). The history of domination and external authority presents challenges as students, particularly women, are taught to disregard any potentially abusive situations. Jyoti reflects below on her years working very closely with a guru:

*I have a guru for my prāṇāyāma which I have kind of fallen out with. It was partly to do with him saying that whenever I am experiencing anything bad in relationships it is my shadow and a reflection of myself. I am sure that shadow work can be beneficial. But for me, what he said made me really upset. I started thinking about all of the horrible things that are happening in the world and wondering if they were a reflection of me? Putting the world's disease onto my shoulders made me enter into a bit of a depression. I didn't want to go out and socialise. I turned to discipline to get the darkness out of me, and I was having a really tough time following his teachings. Honestly, it was only recently that I started to recognise that this was damaging. I started at a new studio and the people there were very kind. The teaching style was more compassionate. This one teacher took me aside one day. She must have known what I needed to hear. She said, "you are enough." And I broke down into tears. That whole lesson taught me that I shouldn't blindly follow one guru. Especially when blindly following that one teacher is negatively impacting my*

*wellbeing. So, I think tradition needs to be taken on with a bit of common sense, and I think I lost that common sense when I devoted myself to my guru. It blinded my common sense, it made me doubt myself. And that is what I had to reclaim...my faith in myself. (Jyoti)*

This past year has been an interesting time to research Yoga lifestyles. With claims of abuse surfacing, the voices of authority in Yoga are beginning to be questioned. In recent years, allegations of abuse implicating a number of experienced teachers in longstanding Yoga traditions is causing division in a number of popular Yoga lineages (Farhi, 2019; Fish, 2006; Singleton & Goldberg, 2013). A recent move towards practice termed “post-lineage Yoga” promotes teachings that are “neither entirely guru-sanctioned, nor entirely secularised” (Wildcroft, 2018, p. 14). Teachers ascribing to this evolution in practice are placing emphasis on personal discovery and self as guru (Remski, 2019).

Contemporary gurus are beginning to lose respect from some of their followers when their teachings do not match their lifestyle choices. The women of this study offered different accounts of both supportive and challenging situations with teachers who were male and female, local and foreign. The quality in a teacher that most inspired the women of this study was an ability to inspire self-inquiry and reinforce the importance of making individually relevant choices. The extent to which a teacher can encourage students to reflect and make personally meaningful decisions around teachings became instrumental in the students’ continued dedication to Yoga lifestyles.

Vertinsky (2012) describes various Yoga texts and the ways that they both influence practitioners and are indicative of the range of social and cultural conditions at the time of publication. Describing Mauss’ *Techniques of the Body*, Vertinsky (2012) mentions that, while teachers featured in some publications encouraged disciplined Yoga teachings, others encouraged rethinking practice and imagining possibilities for “new meanings” (Vertinsky, 2012, p. 536). While some inspiring teachers in Yoga may be promoting blind faith, others are encouraging practitioners to consider how their contemporary embodiment of Yoga can bring life to practices and build opportunities for adaptation and new imaginings (Vertinsky, 2012). Below, I reflect on how the

women of this study, through their continual turn inwards, are finding the confidence to establish new ways of thinking about Yoga lifestyles.

## **Finding the guru within**

The women participating in this research described new ways to think about Yoga lifestyles as pathways for developing a sense of authenticity through daily practices. The following quote from Manaia focuses on balance:

*Embodying Yoga is something that is a balancing act for me. And there's kind of seasons for me with my attention to Yoga. I know that when I am in a regular practice of staying present, getting on my mat, making time for meditation, that my whole life is more in flow and it's more balanced. And then there's a little bump...and somehow, this regular practice just becomes non-existent. Eventually all the stuff in my head will get more and more and more and then there'll be another bump that kind of jolts me back into my practice. It will be like, 'Oh my god! Why did you sit on your ass watching Netflix for four hours when you could have dedicated one of those hours to meditating?!' (laughs)...So yeah, I endeavour to bring more Yoga into every aspect of my life, but it's a balancing act. (Manaia)*

Manaia's quote above offers an example of the ways that Yoga is lived as a fluctuating lifestyle that is always responding to life. The women of this study are living in a contemporary world that is fast-paced. Consistently adapting Yoga practices to suit their daily needs, they are building personally meaningful lifestyles that sometimes also involve Netflix. These varied and individually defined lifestyles problematise presentations of Yoga as practices for disciplining the body in order to de-stress or demonstrate mastery (Cowans, 2016). The women of this study reveal multi-faceted realities that are undulating while they respond to daily life.

After years of working with the practices of Yoga as lifestyle teachings for increasing self-awareness, the women regularly mention coming to an understanding of practices as a range of teachings that can be adapted for their own, individualised needs. Although many of the women are adopting ancient teachings in contemporary lives,

they do not find changes in circumstances to be problematic. Below, Kakini is discussing the adaptation of ancient Yoga teachings amongst her contemporary life:

*I don't think it matters about bringing the ancient teachings into today's world. The teachings have to apply because you're still in a Yoga practice. When you are practicing, the world's accessories aren't there. It's just you and the practice. So how different is that from the ancient times? I suppose the challenges come when you are out of your practice and in the world. Like, for me, I think about time constraints. I work and I have a family, and so the pace of life is fast. And so, those things are things that are a part of my daily life and my practice helps me with managing the stress that comes along with all of that. (Kakini)*

Kakini's example mirrors a previous quote from Breeze that describes Yoga as a system that can support daily life. Here, Kakini mentions the importance of having practices that honour time restraints and the multiple roles she holds between work and family life. Committing to regular practices that encourage authenticity, the women of this study are navigating teachings and continually shifting their practices to accommodate for changing circumstances. Maha Shakti describes her process of working with ancient teachings below:

*There is always a kriya<sup>19</sup> for everything. And so, if you're having an issue just go to the bible (indicates her Yoga manual) and get that kriya. You can build your own set, your own personal set to work on. And so it's not about following a guru, it's about finding the guru within. (Maha Shakti)*

Many of the women in this study still mention the importance of ancient Yoga texts in their contemporary Yoga lifestyles. However, the way that they are working with these teachings has softened after years of practicing self-compassion and honouring authenticity. Instead of worrying about abiding by all of the rules associated with living 'the' Yoga lifestyle, these women are seeing the huge range of teachings as resources that can support daily life. Like Maha Shakti, Uma also mentions the continued relevance of ancient teachings:

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<sup>19</sup> Refer to Appendix One for translation.

*I actually go back to the Yoga sūtras a lot. Patañjali's Yoga sūtras are kind of my basis. They are such nice little succinct explanations...and it's right on as far as I can tell. So that's usually where my mind goes for things like that. And then from there, it goes to my lived experience I guess. But I find the sūtras line up pretty well with my experiences and help to guide me. (Uma)*

Importantly, the recommendations contained in the *Yoga sūtras* do not override Uma's internal knowing. Instead, she works with teachings as tools that can support her increasing self-awareness. As experienced Yoga lifestyle practitioners, these women are engaging with practices differently. They are approaching practices in ways that are individualised and woven amongst their daily lives. They are not using a Yoga lifestyle as a replacement for their identity, rather, they are using the teachings of Yoga to support their lifestyles. The women's long-term, lived experiences of Yoga in this study indicate that contemporary practitioners are finding most benefit in adopting the philosophies of Yoga through careful and considered application that reflect individualised authenticities and change over time.

Interestingly, this gradual and individualised approach to Yoga lifestyles as continual processes of inquiry remains under-represented in Yoga lifestyle literature. Yoga, in a neoliberal context, is often portrayed as a method through which one can exert self-discipline while following external guidance to achieve tremendous feats of agility and mind control (Lea, Philo & Cadman, 2016). As mentioned in the literature review chapter, some publications that use the term 'Yoga lifestyle' in academia still feature short and intensive intervention studies based on the decisions of a few individuals in positions of authority and leave no room for personal variation and change over time (Khalsa et al., 2009; Yadav et al., 2012). The women of this study all mention feeling supported by the teachings of Yoga as personalised applications of various teachings. However, dominant discursive formations of discipline in Yoga still influence the women.

Though Yoga lifestyles are encouraging self-reflection and reinforcing the importance of guidance that can come from within, the women are not removed from the discursive representations of Yoga nor the neoliberal, capitalist societies they are moving within.

As such, the journey of living in a contemporary Yoga lifestyle remains a continual becoming. The women are consistently navigating multiple conflicting aspects of lived experiences that are both material and discursive. The women of this study find themselves lost, turning away, coming back, becoming frustrated and then elated, and this multiplicity of experiences has no end.

Claiming a Yoga lifestyle and suggesting that the women find their way through various discursive formations to arrive at authenticity does not indicate a final destination. Furthermore, I am not suggesting that the women are always embodying authenticity. However, their continual desire to learn about self (amongst the world), offers them opportunity to continually reflect and choose to the best of their ability. Turning inwards and paying attention to sensory experiences, as encouraged by Yoga teachings, and practiced throughout their daily lives, is further giving the women opportunity to gain embodied understandings of authenticity.

### ***Learning authenticity through embodied experiences***

As suggested above, it is a turn inwards and a curious observation of thoughts and sensations that encourages the women to inquire deeply about their lived experiences. This maintained, personal inquiry is what commits them to the practices of Yoga as processes for reflection that help inform choices in attempts towards individually meaningful lifestyles. In this section, I reflect on the women's embodied ways of knowing and describe how these insights are further influencing their choices around authenticity in their daily lives.

Authenticity, embodied through Yoga practices, offers opportunities for these women to reflect more deeply on underlying ethical and moral principles. I suggest the consideration of underlying principles in Yoga may be interpreted as leading the women to living with integrity throughout their lives. Continually turning inwards, the women of this study mention learning through their embodied experiences and further suggest that they are gaining valuable insights that are guiding understandings of authenticity and associated lifestyle choices. Below, Uma reflects on learning from her body and making subtle adjustments throughout her daily life based on her observations:

*As an athlete, I always used to push it through and be tough and work harder. That whole 'no pain no gain' kind of attitude. But I found that if I took that little bit of a step back, I could observe that there was an innate intelligence in being a human being. I could see that if you stop and listen, you can make little adjustments to your posture that will enable you to run a little bit longer, or breathe a little bit more deeply. So there are ways that...if you are listening to how your body is working...you can adjust so that you can experience a lot less stress. (Uma)*

Previously, I mentioned the difference between yogic and sporting mindsets and the 'no pain no gain' mentality. Here, Uma reflects on the stressors she could sense while pushing her body to extremes. In reflecting on her bodily sensations regularly, she notes that she is able to make subtle adjustments that greatly influence her experiences in daily life. Uma describes how her embodied experiences are giving her the opportunity to learn more broadly about authenticity. She describes responding to the internal sensations she is witnessing by very subtly shifting her decisions throughout her daily life. Many of the women mention similar experiences after years of engaging with Yoga lifestyles. In the quote below, Maha Shakti describes a continued internal reflection through the daily practices of Yoga and how this influences her lifestyle choices:

*It's an awakening of people's awareness. People are becoming more conscious and more connected, and Yoga is helping with this. You don't notice these shifts happening...you just start making different choices, doing different things, going down different paths. You just start listening to what your body is wanting. You start listening to yourself and just being in touch with yourself more. (Maha Shakti)*

Maha Shakti mentions listening to the body and gaining more self-awareness through this process. Paying attention to sensations in the body was mentioned by many of the women in this study and often attributed with promoting different lifestyle choices. In Aroha's journey with Yoga, she describes her decisions to give up drinking and change eating habits based on listening to messages she receives from her body:



*I've been sober for over 16 years. And I mean, that is something that I had to do. It was a decision that I had to make because I was kind of at the crossroads. It was like, do you want to live, or do you want to die? So yeah, whether Yoga helped me to get to that space, I really don't know. But, to me, that is a big part of being a yogi right now. It's what I'm consuming. It's what I'm doing to my mind, my spirit and my whole body. I really believe that with Yoga your organs shift. Your internal organs transform. And you start hearing the messages...and you start listening. My organs start telling me, 'I'm not even interested in eating meat.' They don't want a bar of it.<sup>20</sup> They let me know they don't want to drink alcohol, you know? It's killing them. (Aroha)*

Aroha's journey includes years of healing from trauma and continually choosing based on authenticity and what is right for herself. In the above example, she describes an internal language that the practitioner can begin to observe through their practice of Yoga. Tuning in to an internal language to guide decisions in life stands apart from neoliberal notions of empowerment and external expectations of achievement (Barbour, Clark & Jeffrey, 2019; Fullagar, 2020; Gill & Orgad, 2018).

Contrary to discourses promoting busy lifestyles as indicators of success (Gill & Scharff, 2011; Rottenberg, 2018), the women of this study prioritise the knowledge they gain when slowing down and listening inwards. Valuing slowing down and taking time to observe, they were given opportunity to hear gentle (and at times strong) insights coming from deep within. Regularly turning inwards is helping the women to continually refine a deeply personal, individualised approach to Yoga. The ways that the women of this study are embodying Yoga lifestyles demonstrates vastly different adaptations of practices. This variation is indicative of embodied insights gained through observing subtle guidance through experience and is always in a process of becoming.

Though the women mention varying journeys of different lengths, dedications, spaces, places and practices, they all mention the importance of building an individually suitable practice. All of the women's journeys shifted when they began to understand

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<sup>20</sup> "They don't want a *bar* of it" is a local saying. It can be translated as, "they want nothing to do with it."

that they were the only ones that could provide the answers for themselves. They began to understand that Yoga was not a practice of pushing away, restricting and fitting into rules or into a stereotype to become a yogi. On the contrary, they began to realise that through movement, breath, meditation and ethics, a Yoga lifestyle could enable them to access an understanding of their unique individuality and their associated individualised needs. Below Hamsa offers insight on this from one of her teachers:

*One of my teachers called it 'taking the weather report.' She encouraged us to tune inwards throughout the day to just see how things were going. Kind of scan the body and become really curious about where things are at, and then get really honest. In relation to practices, she got us thinking about what would be suitable in each moment...what was the body asking for, and how can we work with the weather. So like, you don't want to wear a wool jacket on a sunny day....same goes for Yoga. You don't want to force meditation when you are agitated. You can start with breathing and settle the system. Or I guess just really thinking through why you are doing practices. And are they suitable to how things are going right now. In this way, I have become a lot more accepting of myself and have way more compassion in my approach to Yoga. (Hamsa)*

In Hamsa's description above, she presents Yoga as a continual process of checking in and observing embodied experiences. Prioritising increased awareness prompted many of the women to begin letting go of extreme discipline and external definitions of what constitutes a Yoga lifestyle. The desire to force themselves to become an idealised version of a yogi began to soften and was replaced by the desire to continually establish individual integrity. Uma describes the inspiration she takes from spiritual masters she observed while growing up amongst a Yoga community:

*I have seen a few people that I would consider spiritual masters. And it seems like their personality is very much still there. They don't suddenly become these amazing holy, always holy people. Although they are. Although....they might still be abrupt or harsh with people. They still have their own personalities, you know? Some of them laugh a lot, and some of them are kind of quiet, and it's interesting to see. I remember them when*

*I'm keeping goals in mind. So, when I think of things to aspire to, it's not like I'm trying to push my whole personality aside. The practices are meant to make me more of what I already am. I'm trying to grow and work within. (Uma)*

Uma describes what I have witnessed in many of the women whilst moving alongside them in this ethnography. After years of engaging with the practices of Yoga throughout their daily lives, these contemporary women Yoga practitioners are embodying authenticity and adjusting their lives accordingly. This multiplicity in practice expands understandings of Yoga lifestyles as either 'traditional' or 'commercial' and disrupts stereotypical representations of yogis. Broadening the representation of Yoga lifestyles to consider authenticity in practice as individually defined, helps to problematise whose voices are accepted and whose are considered 'other' (Miller, 2016). As Jyoti mentions below, contemporary Yoga lifestyles are built upon practices that reflect the life being lived:

*Today, I don't fight with myself. And also, I realise that when I was living a very strict yogi life I was abusing myself, I was battling my ego. I have come to realise that occasionally, a glass of wine is not going to harm me...occasionally...but I don't binge drink. I look after myself, I look after others, and I try not to get so obsessed with the rules. Every day I breathe, every day I walk, I am living life. (Jyoti)*

### ***'Tools not rules'***

Throughout this chapter, I have developed a discussion of the ways that women are grappling with multiple influences to continually redefine authenticity in their Yoga lifestyles. Out of the women's embodied experiences over time, while reflecting on the way that they are working with the multitude of Yoga teachings presented to them, many used the term 'tools.' Below, Michael speaks on this as she looks through her journal writing during our second recorded conversation at the end of this ethnography:

*'Tools not rules' is what I have written down. (She continues to read from her journal). 'If yoga is just like a guide book then it's not absolute rules.'* (She looks up and reflects). *Yeah. I guess if it's just a guidebook then that*

*idea of 'tools not rules' makes sense. You tend to turn to the page of the manual that is serving you. (Michael)*

Michael continues by reflecting on why contemporary practitioners might be prioritising certain 'tools' over others and suggests that this could be indicative of the needs of contemporary practitioners:

*Yeah...and then that contemporary thing about life today, or life in general...that the only given thing is change and fluctuation. We are always changing in response to our outer world. So, maybe it's the pace that we are living in that is causing us to choose different tools...I don't know. I mean, I think we are still using the same tools today as in ancient days, we are just prioritising different ones. And maybe that's a sign of the times. In terms of taking bits of yoga as tools that might serve us in our contemporary way with yoga, I am definitely seeing a lot more meditative and slower practices in the world...like Yoga nidra. And maybe this is what contemporary practitioners need in order to balance the fast pace we are living in. (Michael)*

As Michael mentions in the quote above, and as discussed throughout this thesis, lifestyles are not static. Lives are in continual motion, responding to worlds that are continually changing. The women of this study mention the importance of using tools that can support their varied lives as they respond to the contemporary worlds within which they find themselves. As Michael suggests, different situations call for different tools. As such, any 'authentic' Yoga practices seen today may appear very different in the future. The tools that are being used now may lose relevance as Yoga lifestyles continue to adapt and adopt alongside a changing external world that practitioners are intricately implicated amongst.

Although the women are finding new relevance in personally meaningful adaptations of practice, the dominant discursive formation of discipline in Yoga continues to influence the women as they rationalise their decisions to stray from regimented daily practices in favour of authentic lifestyle choices. Their continued navigation of multiple sources of knowledge amidst contemporary lives, in attempts at arriving to some semblance of

authenticity in their lives, does not reveal ‘perfect’ practitioners. On the contrary, their continual struggles reveal a common reality for all women living in contemporary times. Amidst recommendations to self-regulate, women are being subtly controlled by cultures promoting self-care as emancipatory (McRobbie, 2015). Though the women of this study are immersed amongst pressures to obtain a ‘Yoga body’ and live the disciplined life of a ‘yogi,’ their considered decisions reflect authentic choices resulting in counter-hegemonic embodiments of Yoga.

### ***Being a ‘good’ yogi***

What is a ‘good’ yogi? In discussions with many of the women, we considered what constitutes a good yogi. Often, their descriptions depict an idealised representation of a yogi who is living a ‘perfect’ lifestyle and this is frequently characterised by extreme discipline. This topic connects to earlier distinctions between ‘traditional’ versus ‘contemporary’ Yoga lifestyles. The women’s ideas around who and what constitutes a ‘yogi’ resulted in much variation. Below, I offer two different definitions around when it is appropriate to use the term yogi. In Jyoti’s example, a yogi is someone who is dedicated, authentic and experienced:

*Oh my gosh, today everyone is a yogi. If you can stand on your hands, you are a yogi. For me, the name itself has to be earned after living the yogic way of life for many, many years. And living it from an authentic space. Not what I was doing before...just restriction, restriction, restriction...that is not a yogi, that is obsession. So maybe a yogi is somebody who practices for more than 30 years, more than 40 years. By that time, it’s not a lifestyle, it’s what they are. Then they are a yogi. So, it’s not just using the words. People saying ‘I am a yogi’ or ‘I am a yogini’ with minimal practice...that just makes me cringe. (Jyoti)*

As Jyoti mentions in the quote above, the word ‘yogi’ is used frequently amongst today’s practitioners and can have a variety of meanings depending on the person using the word. For her, to be able to use the word yogi insinuates that the individual has been living alongside the teachings for a long enough period of time to fully embody the practices. Jyoti’s definition prioritises experience, whereas Kakini’s references being

able to notice the influence of her practices when faced with challenging moments in her daily life:

*I've noticed, that I've really pulled back with things like anger. I'm more patient, I can relax. Whereas, before Yoga, I would have immediately reacted wayyyy before thinking about it. And now I can sort of go (takes deep inhale...and long exhale...). Yeah. And so one of my 'things' is like... 'cause, in the car...I mean everyone's like that in the car... they're like 'RAHHH!' And so that's kinda been one of my ongoing tests...like, if I can be chill in the car then I reckon I'm a yogi. (Kakini)*

As identified in the examples above, the women of this study are coming to very different interpretations around who can claim the term yogi. In both cases provided, the women are mentioning the importance of dedicating self to practicing the teachings of Yoga until they are embodied throughout daily life. I extend upon these definitions of yogis to consider how pathways of authenticity and journeys towards becoming a 'yogi' are similar. Below, I offer a quote from Miller (2016) to support my description of the negative discursive formations that arise when practitioners use generalised statements around best practices for all 'good' yogis:

Heavier yogis face claims they are not adequately adhering to yogic values of ahimsa (non-harm) regarding their own health or that they are not "correctly" listening to their bodies both on and off the mat (and subsequently aren't a "real" or "good" yogi). (p. 8)

The fat shaming described in the above quote is an issue that arises alongside discursive formations of thin bodies as indicators of discipline and health. Considering the judgemental and limiting opportunities for women to attain the label of a 'good' yogi through discipline, this section recommends living authentically over prioritising being 'good.' Choosing pathways of authenticity over conformity provides the potential to think critically and choose practices that foster self-care. Although the women of this study are surrounded by marketing featuring thin, lithe, flexible bodies and are navigating the extensive pressures to attain certain ideals, they are conscientiously pressing against these external images by continually returning to their embodied

experiences in Yoga. They admit to being influenced by the limited versions of Yoga presented through media, however, their continual daily practices of connecting with care to their individualised and embodied experiences are giving them the opportunity to consistently reclaim authentic versions of both health and Yoga. It is this continual return to awareness and prioritising authenticity that sets these women apart. Although the culture of Yoga is externally selling a certain vision of what this lifestyle consists of, these women reveal the nuances present when committing to this way of living.

These findings are similar to what Ball and Olmedo (2013) discovered in their work with school teachers. In emails where teachers were resisting neoliberal politics by acting “irresponsibly” (p. 85), they were in fact taking care of themselves and locating new possibilities for self and education. In choosing authenticity over obeying rules, there is potential to rethink Yoga lifestyles. Below, Manaia reflects on her desire to maintain authenticity:

*I am that kind of person that just wants to be real. I don't want to just give this like Instagrammable bloody fiction, because we are not perfect. We are imperfect. And if someone asks me how I am? I'm bloody honest. I'm like, 'I'm sh\*\* so let's just talk about you.' Or like, 'oh my god today is amazing!' It depends the day, but I never lie. So, my motto for my life is to stand up and just be authentic. Whatever that is looking like on that moment and on that day. (Manaia)*

For the women of this study, authenticity over time requires non-conformity, falling away from practice, returning and rebuilding. Their journeys in Yoga lifestyles are continual, messy and non-linear. I found great inspiration in an email that I received from Marama on the journey of a Yoga lifestyle. Her description of getting lost and found in Yoga is poetically woven into the metaphor of sailing and continually redirecting towards a guiding star (as a metaphor for authentic self). It is in-depth, profound and worthy of inclusion. It is also quite long, therefore, I have placed our exchange in an appendix (refer to Appendix 13 for Marama's metaphor). Before concluding this chapter, I offer insights into my personal journey with Yoga.

## Researcher reflections: My continually becoming Yoga lifestyle

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*18 years old*

*My flatmate is encouraging me to join a Yoga class...*

*"C'mon it'll be fun and I hear the lady is real spiritual."*

*I don't know what she means by this but I agree to go along.*

*Visualising the colour pink, we float away in a bubble.*

\*

*24 years of age*

*Strolling through the streets in my lululemon tights...*

*My Yoga mat and my espresso in my reusable cup are my accessories of choice.*

*I am oblivious to my hipster status and blissfully ignorant of my privileges.*

*I mean... I feel good...so I must be doing something right (right?).*

*Yoga is something I do with my friends.*

*Sweating through intense hot power classes...*

*Sharing gossip over brunch...*

*These are our Sunday hobbies.*

\*

*I am 28...*

*and I'm living an extremely stressful life in the UK.*

*I begin to rely on my weekly Yoga classes to ground me.*

*(I feel like I am gasping for air)*

*Yoga gives me the opportunity to breathe and I take great inspiration from my teachers.*

*I start becoming curious about the Yoga lifestyle that they are talking about...*

*what kind of lifestyle does a Yoga person live?*

*Maybe it's the kind of lifestyle I need to start living...*

*I wonder if a new way of life will bring me more joy.*

\*

*My 29<sup>th</sup> birthday*

*I am reading the Yoga sutras...*

*I turn to my friend with an overly excited look on my face...*

*he knows the look and laughs.*

*"Not funny! You have to read this! I feel like I've found the secret guidebook to living!"*

*This is the year I dive deeply into practice and start questioning the purpose of life.*



*I dedicate myself to Yoga – it's the only thing that is bringing me any joy.  
But...searching for a limitless bliss that is always slightly out of reach is exhausting.  
I decide that my path is just not going to be in the city and so...  
I run away.*

✱

*My lonely years begin at 32  
I teach Yoga and meditation deep in the Guatemalan jungle...  
I work for large corporate Yoga companies...  
I build meditation courses online...  
I keep diving into experiences hoping I will 'find myself' but never quite arrive.  
I am lost and confused.*

✱

*This year marks my 39<sup>th</sup> turn around the sun  
I am teaching, researching and practicing Yoga...  
and yet...I am no closer to locating the 'answers.'  
In talking to women deeply about Yoga, I begin to realise there are none.  
The key to life is living.  
Understanding this is liberating.*

✱

In the first few months of this research I committed myself to a daily six a.m. practice. Even after 20 years, I had not let go of the idea that early morning practice equated serious dedication to Yoga. After a few months, I was tired, frustrated and far from connected to myself. My knees hurt, my body ached and I was irritable. My yearning to unveil 'the' ultimate system of Yoga was taking me away from myself. My body was giving me all of the signs but I was not paying attention.

This research required me to be vulnerable, and in that vulnerability, I have allowed myself to be seen, to crumble and to rebuild. Talking to women of all ages about their journeys with Yoga opened me to the understanding that I am not alone and there are no definitive answers. My lifestyle does not reflect all of the recommendations in the guidebooks, but I am living alongside Yoga as I continually reflect upon my lived experiences. Moving, breathing and trying to consider my actions. I am not a sage, but I am influenced by the philosophies of kindness and authenticity. My life alongside Yoga is a continual journey that frequently shows me how much I have to learn.

## Summary

The women of this study are working, retired and studying and they are living in different ages and stages of life whilst embodying a range of Yoga practices. Some are living rurally while others are in the city, and their experiences in Yoga include both international and local contexts. At times, they are participating in the commercialisation of Yoga whilst enjoying the occasional glass of wine, but at other times, they find themselves immersed in Yoga communities where they observe silence and extreme discipline. The women's Yoga lifestyles are a cumulation of both ancient and contemporary teachings all contributing to multi-faceted, complex lived experiences.

There are many hierarchies and dominant power structures that remain in the Yoga culture. After moving alongside the women and seeing the vast range of practices being embodied in everyday life, I now appreciate how the pressures to live according to a 'traditional' style of Yoga remain present in the women's decision making processes around lifestyle practices. However, through their continual dedication to the practices of Yoga, the women of this study are finding pathways through various influences and are locating personally meaningful adaptations of Yoga throughout their lives. The teachings they are engaging with are at the same time ancient and contemporary, but most importantly, their lifestyles reflect decisions to prioritise authenticity (interpreted as finding integrity) over conformity to any one way to live with Yoga.

Previous lifestyle literature discusses the influences of neoliberalism on self-governance and discipline in fitness and movement cultures (Lea, 2009; Markula, 2004). While the women of this study reflect upon the multiple pressures that are facing them as they navigate their lives, after embodying Yoga for many years, they are establishing individualised pathways and disrupting normative formations of Yoga lifestyles. The women of this study are acknowledging the benefit in continually navigating journeys that prioritise authenticity in practice alongside changing life conditions. Although they are putting effort into continual attempts at choosing based on embodied understandings, they also experience moments where they are questioning and lost. The journey of continually reassessing authenticity is not 'perfect.'

This idea that one can live a perfect Yoga lifestyle and be considered a 'good' yogi is a discursive formation. The women's experiences in Yoga lifestyles, as dedicated

practitioners, helps to demonstrate that consistently committing to the practices of a Yoga lifestyle does not bring continual bliss. Further, their varied lives problematise the notion that genuine Yoga lifestyles produce disciplined individuals that all look, act and choose consumptive practices similarly. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, a defining feature of a 'lifestyle' in a particular group lies in the common values, choices and associated identities that are built upon these shared principles (Stebbins, 1997). The value of authenticity is a common feature of contemporary women's Yoga lifestyles, and has led the women in this study towards embodying authenticity and reflecting more deeply on ethical and moral principles in order to live Yoga lifestyles with integrity. Nevertheless, this shared value guides choices that result in extremely varied ways of living life and embodying Yoga.

## Chapter Five: Entangled Yoga bodies

This chapter dives deeply alongside the women practitioners to contemplate the complexity of a lived experience in a Yoga body. The contemporary women practitioners of this study are embodying Yoga and, as the quote from Nutmeg below indicates, are often using the word ‘union’ to describe the experience of Yoga:

*For me, Yoga is the union of the mind and the body but it's so much more than that, as far as, the union is not contained to one person, it's with everything. And it's not just the individual, it's everything all at once.*  
(Nutmeg)

Similar to Nutmeg, the majority of the women in this study mention the word union when describing Yoga. The women's understandings of union are nuanced but share commonality. Many of the women reference moments of yogic states of absorption as facilitating an awareness of an existence that is complex, interconnected and involving both human and non-human materiality. They understand their worlds to always be connecting and in perpetual motion.

To make meaning of the complexities that the women were demonstrating, I was drawn to the work of Karen Barad (2007) whose theory of agential realism encourages ways of thinking about the ontological inseparability of matter. Her theory of agential realism was introduced in the literature review chapter and entanglement in methodology was described in Chapter Three. Amongst the pages that follow, I conceptualise entanglement in relation to the women's experiences in Yoga bodies. This chapter weaves between embodied experiences of yogic union as complete absorption and the work of Karen Barad around entanglement. Situating myself somewhere between these two ways of knowing, I have found a mutually enriching dialogue that has stimulated a creative process of becoming informed by academic theory and embodied experiences.

The women in this project repeatedly describe embodying Yoga as bringing them moments where they experience an inseparable union. Barad's (2007) concept of entanglement is a mutually implicated intra-action that is continually becoming and involving all materiality (human and non-human). Both are ontological stances that

have their own unique idiosyncrasies alongside their similarities. Inspired by the experiences of the women Yoga practitioners, this chapter draws on their insights as moving Yoga bodies to contemplate their existence as always entangled and continually becoming.

## **Representing entanglements**

Researchers working with Barad's concepts and Yoga practitioners embodying union are grappling with the challenge of describing complex embodied experiences in language. To articulate the entanglement of existence and experiences of yogic union is a significant undertaking. There is benefit in situating complex concepts, such as entanglement, within the context of a discussion that centres around a specific topic. As such, this chapter builds a complex theoretical discussion on existential interconnectivity through the construct of a Yoga body.

Drawing inspiration from scholars contemplating representation in feminist new materialisms (Baxter, 2020; Bost, 2016; Coffey, 2019; Fullagar, 2020), I use a particular construct (Yoga body) to explain a complex concept from feminist new materialisms (entanglement). Bringing the concept of entanglement to life through the example of a 'Yoga body' contains this discussion and enables the women's experiences of embodying entanglement to be articulated through the construct of a body. Further, it allows me to expand discussion to consider a Yoga body as always entangled and continually intra-acting within a contemporary world that is always in a state of becoming.

My creative positioning within this research was inspired by feminist scholars, the women's embodied experiences and my own reflexive process. This range of theory and lived experience inspires evocative writing that I include in this chapter as a further element of my analysis (Ellis & Bochner, 2016). Drawing upon the works of Suzanne Bost (2016), Simone Fullagar (2020) and Megan Popovic (2012), I engage with creative writing as a method for extending the representation of an entangled Yoga body. After describing the women's experiences embodying entanglement through their Yoga bodies, three examples are provided to represent the complexities of these entanglements amongst contemporary worlds.

The evocative writing included in this chapter is inspired by the women's insights, feminist theory and my research journal. These pieces of writing are strategically included with the intention to arouse an emotional engagement with the material. Using the examples of breath, Yoga mats, and the heart, an embodied, nuanced, entangled experience is presented through creative writing to evoke emotion and highlight complexity. The examples were chosen based on experiences with the women, frequency of mention in empirical material and relevance within contemporary Yoga discourse. Further rationale supporting both the examples chosen and the use of experimental writing styles are provided in the later sections of this chapter.

Accommodating for the task of bringing entanglement to life through a moving Yoga body, this chapter weaves through multi-faceted entanglements. However, before moving into this discussion it is important to provide an overview of research that engages with Barad's concept of entanglement. Situating this discussion amongst a range of literature by scholars working with Barad's concepts in movement studies helps to contextualise this chapter, and demonstrates how this discussion differs and extends previous understandings of entanglement.

## **Barad, entanglement and Yoga bodies**

Within both the literature review and methodology chapters of this thesis, I discussed the work of Karen Barad. As mentioned previously, her theory of agential realism and associated concepts are being applied variously in research investigating women's lived experiences in moving bodies. In the literature review chapter, I analysed the research of a selection of feminist theorists engaging with concepts arising out of Barad's agential realism and in particular focused on articles by Baxter (2020) and Fullagar (2020). This demonstrated the range of ways that Barad's concepts are being applied within research on moving bodies.

In the methodology chapter, I considered how an entanglement could be formed between two bodies of literature (Yoga and feminisms) to build a mutually implicated research process informed by various knowledges. In this chapter, I broaden this discussion on entanglement to consider how women's experiences in Yoga bodies are entangled and arising as material-discursive formations. Below, I extend upon the way

that I am engaging with the concept of entanglement in this chapter.

### *Entanglement*

Drawing specifically upon Barad's concept of entanglement, I consider a Yoga body as a phenomena<sup>21</sup> arising through the women's lived experiences embodying Yoga. In this chapter, I define Barad's entanglement similarly to how Dale and Latham (2015) articulate it within their article on ethics and entanglement in a not-for-profit organisation:

By 'entanglement' we indicate that human and non-human materialities are inescapably and intimately connected, following the work of Karen Barad (2003, 2007). These entanglements are heterogeneous, interdependent, co-constitutive and dynamic; they are not mere assemblages or collections, but neither are they fixed or essential. (p. 167)

Dale and Latham (2015) suggest that work on embodiment could benefit from considering the inescapable presence of, and relationship between, materialities. For this particular work, I contain this discussion within the construct of a Yoga body. I consider how a Yoga body is intra-acting with material formations and arising as an entangled entity as it moves throughout daily life. This expands previously defined notions of 'Yoga bodies' as athletic, individualised forms (Markula, 2014; Webb et al., 2015) and considers the breadth of embodied experiences in Yoga bodies as entangled phenomena.

The concept of entanglement allows for complexity throughout this discussion. When described through the body, a discussion on entanglement also allows for an acknowledgement of subjectivity. This acknowledgement of difference addresses critiques of Barad's work relating to the exclusion of ethical and political subjectivity (discussed further below) (Braunmühl, 2018). Situating this discussion in relation to the concept of entanglement allows for the complexities of the women's individualised experiences to dialogue with feminist theory. Writing through the concept of entanglement facilitates flexibility in discussion and representation. It enables the women's varied experiences to remain spacious and encourages a broadening

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<sup>21</sup> A formation continually arising out of a mutually implicated material and discursive intra-action (entanglement) (Barad, 2007).

conceptualisation of the many power formations that are simultaneously pressing upon the women's experiences as entangled Yoga bodies.

Working in dialogue with the women's experiences and Barad's concept of entanglement, I hope to reveal that a Yoga body is not a construct that can be separated into parts. It is not at any one time discursively, affectively or materially defined. Rather, it is an entanglement that is in perpetual motion, a phenomena that is mutually implicated in a continual agentic becoming that is being brought to life through the experiences of contemporary women. Furthermore, through this process of conceptualising an entangled Yoga body, the Western discursive formation of a body existing tidily within the confines of a fleshy boundary is challenged (Baxter, 2020).

There are many critiques around the use of Barad's concepts as they pertain to ethics and subjectivity (Braunmühl, 2018; Rekret, 2016). I propose through this work that while all materiality may have agency, each phenomena arises as a discursive formation (as well as a materiality) with many contributing factors that are all influencing lived experiences. To state that lived experiences are completely subjective discounts the complexity of any given situation. Therefore, this chapter illustrates how both interconnectivity and subjectivity can be mutually implicated in an entanglement. In this work, I consider how Yoga bodies and the non-human materiality that they come into contact with throughout their daily lives build entanglements that are infinitely more complex than previous research has revealed. As such, any ethical considerations are equally nuanced.

### ***What a Yoga body does***

While Barad's thinking can direct us to account for the body as both material and social, the most interesting aspect of her argument is the idea of materialization: imagining bodies beyond 'things,' beyond what they are to what they do. (Markula, 2019, p. 3)

I draw upon the quote above from Markula (2019) when building my rationale for reconceptualising a Yoga body through Barad. My reasoning for working with entanglement indicates my efforts to move away from discussions around women's



moving Yoga bodies as objects, and towards understanding them as agentic, intra-acting phenomena.

A moving, gendered body arrives to each moment with a history that is socially, materially, politically, economically, culturally and environmentally formed (Markula, 2019). As a phenomena, an entangled Yoga body arises as a history and a present that are intra-acting in a continually forming, complex experience that incorporates all of these factors. An entangled Yoga body is at the same time materially and discursively becoming amongst systems of power that imprint upon, oppress and govern gendered, moving bodies. All of these aspects are considered throughout this chapter.

The term Yoga body itself cannot be removed from the onslaught of imagery representing a certain type of physical form. The image of a Yoga body as lean, flexible, young, effortlessly calm and predominantly white (Webb et al., 2017), has filled popular Yoga guidebooks published since the 1970s (Blaine, 2016; Markula, 2014; Vertinsky, 2012). This limiting stereotype dominates popular Yoga imagery. The depiction of aesthetically pleasing bodies becomes further complicated by captions encouraging perseverance and self-acceptance, often quoted from ancient Yoga texts (most frequently the *Yoga sūtras of Patañjali*) (Cowans, 2016; Miller, 2016). This point relates back to the tensions described in Chapter Four around women's lived experiences of Yoga lifestyles as simultaneously ancient and contemporary.

The representation of women's bodies through imagery depicting certain body types has been the topic of a wide range of publications throughout feminist literature (Grosz, 1994; Markula, 1995, 2014; Wolf, 1991). Within Yoga and women's fitness publications, a certain limiting body type that is thin, young and lean suggests that some bodies are more capable and/or disciplined while others are not (Markula, 2014). This limited range of representation could prevent bodies that do not fit this unrealistic aesthetic from seeking out Yoga as they do not see these practices as inclusive (Miller, 2016; Webb et al., 2017). Below, Robin reflects on her understanding of women's Yoga bodies prior to engaging in Yoga practices:

*I just felt like I didn't fit in. I felt that Yoga was for girls in spandex, and people that were stronger and more flexible than me. And it reminded me*

*of the girls I went to high-school with...the ones that were the cheerleaders and on the dance crew. And I'm this really inflexible sports-style person. And I guess for some athletes, they don't find it as intimidating...but for me...just something in the back of my head thought, 'this isn't my environment.' I just didn't have that contentment with my body because I was injured and didn't like where I was at. And I mean...I am injured at the moment. But back then, I just felt as though I was at war with my body because of the injury, and all this other stuff. So I just wasn't comfortable going to a class and feeling judged or...exposed. (Robin)*

Robin's description illustrates the powerful discursive formation that surrounds a 'Yoga body' as strong, flexible and clothed in lycra. Yoga imagery provides ample content for a critical discourse analysis on body image and representation of the gendered Yoga body. However, in this chapter, I move to consider materiality and contemplate the multiple, intra-acting factors that are contributing to an entangled Yoga body.

This entanglement, as a socially, culturally, affectively, materially intra-acting phenomena, challenges the idea that a Yoga body is contained by the external boundaries of flesh and form. The women's experiences of an entangled Yoga body expand beyond their physical confines to both impact and be impacted by materiality that is at the same time animate and inanimate, internal and external, affective and expressive. In this chapter (as mentioned above), I acknowledge the political, economic, cultural, environmental history of a gendered body and at the same time, consider it as a construct that is entangled amongst other objects with their own unique genealogies.

## **Embodying entanglement**

In this section I illustrate how women Yoga practitioners are experiencing moments of embodied entanglement. I begin with a quote from Winifred in which she offers a description of her daily Yoga practice of acknowledging interconnectivity:

*One way that I can live my Yoga, or continue to practice throughout my daily life, is to acknowledge connectedness. Everything is connected. We are all one. Every move and every gesture is affecting everything*

*else...and there is this collective energy that we are a part of. (Winifred)*

Winifred's words echo experiences demonstrated by many of the women throughout this ethnography: Yoga is union with everything. Further, she makes references to the importance of acknowledging that her movements or gestures are influencing her experiences. As discussed previously, entanglement is a state of intra-action (Barad, 2007), in which all materiality is mutually implicated. Winifred mentions a collective energy that she is a part of. I am bringing this insight into relationship with Barad's theory that all materiality is in a state of entanglement, and this state is inclusive of bodies.

The women's insights suggest that while they understand there is an energy that they are contributing to, they are not living in a state where they are consistently aware of this interconnection. I interpret the women's descriptions of embodying yogic union as having an awareness that the entanglement of all materiality is the ontological state of the world. However, even with an ontological stance of entanglement, the women only mention glimpses of this interconnectivity as offered through their Yoga lifestyles. It is through their practices of slowing down, becoming mindful, paying attention to breathing, and tuning inwards while moving, that they are able to embody experiences of yogic union. Their descriptions of yogic union resemble writing around the concept of entanglement. This is what drew me to articulate their experiences through Barad (2007). Below Marama reflects on how elements in her daily life allow her the opportunity to experience yogic union. She uses the example of surfing to give insight into a union with the ocean:

*For me, Yoga is that union...Being connected to everything and everyone. And Yoga is a powerful tool to bring people to that space. For me, it's about slowing things right down and being in a meditative place when I practice. But there are other things that contribute to this, for example, my connection to the ocean...because I surf. For me, that's Yoga as well. That's union. Moving as one with the ocean. It's about becoming completely present. Just being completely...in tune...and feeling...at one with the ocean. (Marama)*

In this quote, Marama does not consider herself as separate from the ocean. She is not dissolving into the ocean, but is a co-creator in her lived experience of being at one with the ocean, and these types of experiences are what I am comparing to entanglement. Similar to Marama's lived experiences connecting with the water, in Humberstone's (2013) ethnography she found that engaging in adventurous activities in nature allowed individuals to experience oneness with the environment. As Humberstone (2013) admits, however, these sensuous and spiritual experiences can be challenging to articulate. In this particular discussion with Marama, I distinctly remember regular pauses in the conversation. Reflecting on these moments, I became curious as to what could be prompting these hesitations. In returning to my field notes and transcripts, I noticed that most often, attempts at describing complex embodied experiences connecting with non-human materiality prompted a number of pauses for many of the women. Understanding this, I began to lean into these moments as opportunities to question further and potentially learn about transcendent experiences.

I understand that these pauses were allowing the women moments for collecting thoughts, choosing words and gauging reactions. Placing embodied and complex experiences within the confines of language is a challenge (Barbour, 2018b; Humberstone, 2013). Trusting that descriptions of these, at times transcendent, moments would be both acknowledged and accepted by me as the researcher, demonstrated the women's trust. These were moments where I noticed that my experiences embodying Yoga were allowing me opportunity to connect with the women through similarly felt experiences (Pavlidis & Olive, 2014).

Getting lost amongst an uncertain and significant amount of knowledge within an embodied ethnographic study on Yoga meant that the women of this study (myself included) were also confronted by the limitations of language. Through Barad a new vernacular provides academics with a language to describe moments of interconnection with materiality. The women of this study relied on a variety of descriptive techniques in attempts at verbalising extremely personal, complex moments of what I am likening to embodied entanglement. In the comment from Sophie below, she is describing very intricate connections between an inner and outer world:

*Yeah. So I guess it's that internal transformation. When you are moving and breathing and twisting in new ways, and eating and thinking in new ways, it is changing your insides. And your inner world is being reflected in the outer. So, of course your outer world will change as your inner world changes. Yeah...you are changing yourself. You aren't changing the environment, you are changing your relationship with it. You are seeing it through you...and that explains why it is different from how other people are seeing it. (Sophie)*

Sophie is touching on ideas of entanglement within the restrictions of language. While she is touching on ideas of intra-action, her use of 'inner' and 'outer' may be unintentionally perpetuating a binary and the boundary of flesh. These subtle tensions arose regularly throughout interactions with the women. Frequent pauses and struggles in conversations offered the women opportunity to reflect and grapple with word choice. Below, Aroha experiments with describing intricate experiences where she is becoming aware of both internal and external influences as simultaneously contributing to her embodied experiences in any given situation:

*For me, Yoga is the tuning inwards, but at the same time staying hyper-aware almost of what's happening outwards. Or maybe it's the other way around, tuning outwards but staying hyper-aware of what's inwards. So...it's kind of the balance of being aware of both internals and externals. That's what Yoga is for me, it's being aware that something is getting out of balance somewhere right now. It can be some form of stress or something. Then I go into this kind of Yoga space internally...which requires that I am actually really hyper-aware of what's going on outside and inside. (Aroha)*

Many of the women practitioners are experiencing moments where they feel connected to something more than their physical body. They recognise that their lived experiences in a Yoga body extend beyond the confines of their physical form and use very different expressions when verbalising these instances. In the above examples, Aroha and Sophie similarly mentioned a connection between internal and external influences. I have taken internal and external in the above comments to refer to experiences that are contained

within their physical body and those that are not contained by their fleshy boundary.

This is where the concept of entanglement can blur the boundaries, adding complexity to the notion of a body as something that can be contained by a fleshy form. Considering a Yoga body as entangled suggests that maintaining the boundary of the flesh would be a futile agential cut, adding limitations to the extent that a body can be entangled beyond the skin (Baxter, 2020). Through my understanding of Barad's (2007) concepts and my embodied Yoga practices, I understand how the women's experiences of this complexity can help to add insight into the discussion of a Yoga body as always entangled and ontologically inseparable from materiality. Below, Michael describes her experiences of being an entangled Yoga body referencing energy and force fields:

*You're expanding your energy on all sorts of planes. And yeah, as I continue practicing I'm starting to feel and appreciate that on different levels. I guess I thought of Yoga before as being kind of mind-body. But I didn't really think so much about the energetic body or that sense of there being something else beyond the mind-body. But now I understand that Yoga practice is actually allowing you to expand your force field and connect with everything around you. (Michael)*

Above, Michael is touching on the idea that there is more to Yoga than a mind-body connection. She suggests that there are ways to find connection that expand beyond the mind and body, and alludes to an energy that connects everything. Considering the entanglement of a Yoga body as a dynamic, intra-acting experience moves beyond mind-body, internal-external, biopsychosocial confines to consider a more intricately connected, expansive and complex phenomena. As Breeze offers below, experiencing Yoga through a Yoga body has the potential to bring an embodied understanding of connecting with the universe:

*Yoga is a combination of us, the environment, our breath, our soul, our mind. And we pull everything into balance with Yoga. So, when I say Yoga is pulling everything together into balance, it is not just the body and the soul and the mind, it goes further. Yoga is pulling the environment, the other people, and in the end...the universe. The universe and the people*

*are not separate. We are all one, this is what Yoga helps us understand.*  
(Breeze)

The women's understandings are arising out of their lived experiences embodying Yoga. Considering Barad's (2007) writing while reading the women's transcripts I have been able to see how the concept of entanglement can help to make meaning of the women's efforts to articulate the interconnections they are experiencing. Many of their insights, like Breeze's above, are broad and all encompassing (inclusive of both animate and inanimate materiality). Suggesting that an entangled Yoga body is not separate from the universe implies an intricately entangled continual momentum.

## **A continually becoming Yoga body**

In the following section I focus on the perpetual motion of entanglement. Most of the women considered their momentary existence to be continually in a state of flux. Below, Peanut and I are talking about the multiple ways that Yoga influences life:

*Peanut: I don't think there's an end in it. I think it is always a growth and that's a valuable thing. So, they say that with Yoga it's...*

*(she makes a motion with her hand indicating a spiral going upwards towards the ceiling)...That's it...*

*Allison: Okay yeah....so a continual spiral? Or? What do you mean by... (I repeat her spiralling hand motion)*

*Peanut: Yes, so as the recipient grows, so the understanding grows, and contentment also grows. It becomes a life of continued growth in all ways.*

Peanut acknowledges the continuation of growth in multiple ways. It is the expansion of the Yoga practitioner in multi-faceted ways that will be considered in the pages that follow. What other ways can practitioners continue this spiralling momentum of expansion beyond individualised notions of self-growth? A Yoga body as an entanglement considers the multiple ways that our worlds are shaping and shaped by our movements. My experiences with the women opened my eyes to the dance of life that is shared with birds, trees, horses and the forest floor (as a few of the examples the women provided throughout this ethnography). The women's descriptions of perpetual

motion were connected to both animate and inanimate materiality. In the example that follows Kakini reflects on her place amongst a universe that is in continual momentum:

*Allison: Do nature and environment have an impact on your life?*

*Kakini: Yeah totally. I always go stand outside and just take the time to take it in. Even if I am just standing on the back porch and it's pissing down with rain. I always have to look at the moon too. I just get out there have a look and think to myself, can I feel myself moving around? Because we are moving, we are actually moving all of the time. So, I like to just take a moment to think about the fact that I am actually standing still in my spot, but I am also rotating....as super slow as that may be.*

Offering the perpetual motion of the universe as an example of continual becoming is extremely expansive, however, it demonstrates the depth and breadth of the women's insights and the actuality of momentum. The example below from Marama extends upon this to consider becoming, agency and the impermanence of structured materiality. Using the example of a table, she is able to describe the movement of form through time. Through Marama's metaphor, she highlights how even a table (as something that outwardly appears quite stable) is in motion and included in the continual becoming of all materiality:

*If you think about it, everything is moving all the time and everything will eventually become something else. So actually, the journey of life is an understanding of this whole concept of everything being in motion. Everything being in a state of change. Like this table. This feels so solid to us. This is a table. It is nothing else to us. When we look at this with our logical brains right now in this moment it is a table without a doubt, but actually, if we just step back a bit, at some point previously, this was a tree...then it was wood...and now it is a table. If we move forward in time...soon it will become dismantled and it will perish. And so this table is moving all of the time. It just seems as though it is frozen in the now. And so we get stuck in thinking 'oh, everything is just frozen in this now.' But it's not. And understanding that I am only seeing a snapshot in time has been instrumental in me understanding my existence. (Marama)*



Marama's discussion of a table through time describes its past as a tree and its future breakdown. Her example eloquently illustrates continual becoming, agency and the futility of boundaries in complex entanglements. Haynes (2014) similarly sees the importance in recognising the body as a part of this agential becoming and self-organising efficacy that is inclusive of all materiality. The challenge then becomes considering how to represent an entangled Yoga body as an intra-acting materiality unbound by fleshy form. Hinton (2013) argues that there are many issues surrounding attempts at representing Barad's quantum concepts in words, however, she also insists that Barad's theories can help to 'amplify' rather than diminish discussions around complex issues in feminist publications. This inspired me to locate examples of animate and inanimate phenomena that could help articulate an entangled Yoga body. Below, three examples help to represent a Yoga body as always entangled and always becoming: breath, Yoga mats and the heart.

## **Representing an entangled Yoga body**

Representing embodied and complex experiences of entanglement is a challenging, multi-faceted endeavour, as discussed above. Contemplating how to demonstrate that a Yoga body is always entangled and continually becoming requires reflection on the many ways that a body is impacting and impacted by all materiality. This section challenges the notion that a body is bound by flesh through examples that blur the edges of the epidermis and contemplate the broader social and natural forces influencing material phenomena in any given entanglement.

In recent sport sociology and physical cultures research, the boundaries of objects and bodies have been queried alongside theories that suggest an ontological inseparability of all materiality (Atkinson, 2017; Baxter, 2020; Clark & Thorpe, 2019). A moving Yoga body as an entangled construct is not removed from its political, cultural, environmental and economic history (Markula, 2019). Reconceptualising a Yoga body as entangled does not diminish the complexity of a gendered body moving within power-laden structures of governance, rather, the aim is to encourage an awareness of the ways that a Yoga body is expanding and entangling beyond the boundaries of the skin. Considering the many ways that a body is continually and consistently entangled blurs previously defined boundaries of subject-object.

Representing an entangled Yoga body required an immersion in my detailed field notes from shared interactions, conversation transcripts and journal reflections. Inspired by Baxter's (2020) article on boxing gloves and women's sporting bodies, Clark and Thorpe's (2019) diffractive analysis of a motherhood – Fitbit entanglement, and Atkinson's (2017) ethnography on the presence of sweat, I began to think about the political, cultural, economic histories of material objects in the Yoga world.

In particular, Atkinson's (2017) article uses evocative writing alongside theory to analyse how sensuous experiences with sweat produce meaning in Yoga. He inquires into the range of meanings that are both pleasurable and unpleasant to broaden discussions around the lived experiences that are possible in Yoga *āsana* practices. Considering how I could represent entanglements through objects that might allow an expansive investigation into the everyday experiences of Yoga lifestyles directed me towards the examples I chose for this chapter.

Below, I expand upon the historical, social, material and cultural implications that mutually contribute towards understandings of breath, Yoga mats and the heart. The women's experiences of each example are offered. Their insights are followed by evocative writing that brings together multiple elements and presents emotive possibilities for considering the various factors that are woven through each representation of an entangled Yoga body. Offering an overview of the political, cultural, physical and economic histories (where relevant), demonstrates the agency and impact of a continual material-discursive entanglement. Each example arrives with its unique history and is laden with multiple layers of materially and discursively formed distinctions. Acknowledging these multiple layers helps to highlight the complexity in any entanglement of intra-acting materiality, as all phenomena are arising with multifaceted, cumulative genealogies.

In each example of an entangled Yoga body, the boundaries of materiality are blurred through quotes from the women and through the use of creative writing as an emotionally evocative tool. Expressive prose arose out of this ethnographic inquiry and was inspired by Suzanne Bost's (2016) creative writing and use of multiple knowledges, Barad's concept of entanglement (2007), the women's insights and my personal experiences moving and journaling amongst this research. Other researchers have

experimented with research poetry in ways that have sparked curiosity around materiality (Fullagar, 2020; Popovic, 2012) and yet, I found Bost's (2016) use of creative writing to be the most influential as it entangles political themes from Chicana feminist literature with aspects of Yoga practice including *drishti* (eye gaze), sun salutations and side crow<sup>22</sup>. Below, I grapple with the politics of existing as an entangled, gendered Yoga body that is moving, feeling, intra-acting and becoming with all materiality.

## Entanglement One: Breath

*Allison: Is breath important?*

*Breeze: Yeah...it's what keeps us alive.*

Reviewing transcripts, field notes, and journal entries, breath was the example that was the most frequently mentioned throughout this study. All of the women mentioned the importance of breath awareness in movement practices and throughout their daily lives. As Breeze indicates above, breath sustains life. Therefore, it is an intricately entangled aspect of a Yoga body's existence. Breath is an interesting phenomenon to discuss. Although it is impossible to hold, it is necessary for survival. Drawing awareness to its presence offers much rich material and discursive content to consider.

Breathing exercises were some of the first practices featured in early Yoga research and centred around vital lung capacity and lung function (Bhole, Karambelkar & Gharote, 1970; Broad, 2012; Goyeche, 1979; Patel & North, 1975). An interest in the ways that changing breathing techniques can in turn influence the function of the body remains present in various publications today. In recent popular publications, breathing techniques have become topics of interest amongst individuals attempting to master mind-body techniques and improve breath retention for free diving (Allen, 2018; Hof & Rosales, 2011; Trubridge, 2017).

In academia, Morley's (2001) article uses Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of the lived body and the experience of *prāṇāyāma* to connect theory with experiential knowing. He

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<sup>22</sup> Side crow is a Yoga *āsana*. It is a hand balance that requires twisting and resting stacked knees on the back of one upper arm. While leaning forward, the head stays lifted and the toes come off the ground.

suggests that using lived experience helps to bring complex theories “‘down to earth’ by focusing on the lived human body as philosophical and physical ground” (p. 82). In this section, I similarly aim to unite rich material through lived experiences.

Many of the women of this study mentioned particular *prāṇāyāma* techniques throughout transcripts and in looking over their auto-biographical information I noticed that many of them named *prāṇāyāma* as a ‘tool’ that they most regularly integrated into their daily Yoga lifestyle practices. The range of yogic breathing techniques is vast. Behind each specific *prāṇāyāma* technique is a rationale for its use. Some breathing techniques encourage cooling or warming in the body, some use retention or emphasise longer inhales or exhales (Farhi, 1996). Some *prāṇāyāma* are comical in the sounds and faces that are required. For example, ‘lion’s breath’ requires crossing the eyes and sticking out the tongue. Below, Manaia describes *ujjayi* (oo-JAH-ye)<sup>23</sup> breathing:

*I mean they’re going on about breath, but it’s important to explain what that breath is doing to you. Is it stoking that internal fire? Why do you have to breathe like that? Do you know? If you don’t know, and no one’s ever explained it to you then you’re like, ‘okay...I’m breathing like Darth Vader, but I don’t know why I’m supposed to be breathing like Darth Vader...’ (laughs). (Manaia)*

Manaia mentions different purposes for different breaths. For many of the women, becoming aware of the way that changing their breath could alter their experiences in their bodies sparked curiosity about the intra-action of breath and body. Paying attention to breath often signified an understanding that through breath manipulation, a practitioner could exercise a certain control over the pace of practice (and in turn, life). Hamsa reflects on her breathing practice as entangled with her movement:

*The breath is everything for me. I notice when it becomes short, it’s often when I’m stressed. It can be in a hard pose or when I face a big deadline. In those moments, I become really curious. I pay attention and slow down my breathing. And what I notice is...I am able to calm myself. I recognise it now in classes I attend. People will be huffing and puffing and I am*

---

<sup>23</sup> Refer to Appendix 1 for an extended explanation of *ujjayi*.

*breathing slowly and steadily. It has taken many years, and it will take many more, but it has changed my experiences of stress in my life immensely. (Hamsa)*

T. and I shared about breath in great depth. She attributes breath awareness with helping her to manage crippling anxiety. She gives many examples of learning to breathe and how this training (as Hamsa also mentions) was something that took years. Below, T. reflects on the connection between breath and how her awareness of breath gives her the ability to bring her attention to the present moment:

*For me, to maintain that deep breathing I have to be mindful. As soon as I let my mind go I end up breathing normally. And then it's like, 'oh crap! I lost that breath!' So really, the practice of breathing in Yoga is physically practicing that mindfulness and realising how easy it is to lose that attention. (T.)*

*Pratyāhāra* (mindfulness) through breath awareness helped many of the women return to the present moment and calm themselves in situations where they were feeling overwhelmed. As a metaphor, 'taking a breather' is often associated with taking a moment, a pause, a break. For many of the women, reminding themselves to breathe encouraged them to pay attention, slow down and observe momentary experiences. In one example, Uma is reading through her journal and finds a note to herself. She shares, "I'm writing here about breath, just reminding myself to take three deep breaths before I say anything, just breathe."

Throughout the research, interactions through discussions and Yoga practice included multiple ways that Yoga practitioners are working with the breath, both metaphorically and physically. Thinking of the actual physical impact of breath on the body is remarkable. Breath sustains life. It is a transformative alchemy that is happening continually throughout daily life and does not require thought. Breath is not breath until it is drawn into the body. As air is drawn into the lungs there is a gas exchange. Oxygen (and a mix of other gases) is drawn into the lungs, carried through the blood to oxygenate areas of the body, and flushed out of the body as carbon dioxide (Toro, 2013). In this process, the boundaries between atmosphere and body are blurred. Breeze

reflects on this as she describes union in a studio setting:

*The breath contributes to that union as well. In the studio, our breath has been flowing together and we have actually been breathing the same air. And that is a big thing that contributes to the whole connectedness. No thoughts. Just being right there in the same space, impacted by the same atmosphere, the same breath. (Breeze)*

I chose to work with breath as an intangible and important aspect of our daily lives. It is intricately connected to an entangled Yoga body providing life, and dependent on our choices around length and depth. It impacts our reality and equally, we are impacting it. *Breathe and Receive* is a vignette that describes an experience I shared with one of the women early in the research process:

✱

*Breathe and Receive*

✱

*My morning practice feels off today...*

*Twisting, jumbled, awkward, confronting.*

*In my final pose of rest (savasana) I feel my entire body let out a sigh...*

*Ahhhhwwwuuuuuuusssshhh*

✱

*After practice my brain is foggy.*

*Tea in hand, my friend walks over and sits next to me.*

*She smiles and leans towards me...*

*“I’m wondering about your breathing”*

*I nod, “Me too.”*

*I love her gentle way of approaching insightful teaching moments...*

*“Yes...and also...I was listening to your breathing this morning and I wonder...*

*do you find it hard to receive...?”*

*A decisive “YES” exits my lips.*

✱

*There is no hesitation in my answer. Immediately it’s a yes.*

*I know that I am a product of my environment and I have been socialised to continually give, even if it means throwing myself under a bus for another.*

*I am much more comfortable giving than receiving.*

✱

*“Hm... yes I thought so...”*

*My friend pauses to collect her thoughts and prepare her words...*

*“I notice that your inhale is very short and your exhale is very strong.*

*If I could compare this to life, it's almost as though you are hesitant to receive the gifts  
that the world is trying to give you... and then when you get them... it's as though you  
are throwing them away... Does this make sense...?”*

✱

*I stare in disbelief and nod slowly while my mind begins to whirl...*

*Has she been reading my mind?*

*How can someone get that much about me*

*just by observing my breathing patterns?*

*I feel slightly embarrassed and intimately exposed.*

*I wonder what else she notices...*

✱

*She continues, “Hm...well if that's the case...*

*I wonder what would happen if you were to lengthen your breathing?*

*Maybe you could experiment with long smooth inhales thinking about welcoming all of  
the gifts that you are worthy of receiving. And then follow these inhales with long  
smooth exhales as a way to say thank you to the world for the gifts you are accepting.*

*I wonder if things in your life would shift?”*

✱

*After class, on my drive to the office, I am practicing lengthening my breathing  
and working my head around the notion that I am worthy to receive.*

*It may take years of long breathing to reprogram something so deeply entrenched in my  
psyche... I try not to think about it...*

✱

*Long smooth inhale...*

✱

*Long smooth exhale...*

✱

## Entanglement Two: Yoga mats

*A Yoga lifestyle is taking Yoga everywhere off of the mat. (Michael)*

Many of the women mentioned taking their Yoga ‘off the mat’ as indicative of beginning to move into a Yoga lifestyle and engaging with practices more broadly throughout their daily lives. Signifying that there is a Yoga ‘off the mat’ inversely suggests that there is a practice ‘on the mat’ that is more contained. The example of a mat is linked to the practice of Yoga *āsana* which typically incorporates a squishy, long, rectangular shaped object placed underneath a practitioner for comfort.

As mentioned throughout this thesis, for the majority of the practitioners in this project, Yoga is a practice of union. Considering Yoga as union, it is interesting that associated practices are most often executed on a rectangular mat that distinctly sets out an individualised boundary. The placement of mats demarcates a personal boundary and it is often considered taboo or rude to step on, or even over, another person’s Yoga mat. These preferences for individualised space starkly contrast the concept of Yoga union. Rules and/or best practices around the use of Yoga mats varies and this is dependent on the *shala* (studio space). In the quote below, Nutmeg (as a teacher with experience leading classes in multiple studios and internationally) finds comedy surrounding the placement of mats and the dynamics of personal space:

*Do you know what I notice down here (Aotearoa/New Zealand )? People like their space. Like when they set up their yoga mats. They put them so far apart. Like what the...what is going on there? Someone will come in and set up way in the far corner and then the next person comes and they are way far into the opposite corner. And they are at opposite ends way at the back edges of the room. At first I was like...what IS this? It was so different from what I was used to. I was like, are they trying to mess with me? (laughs) (Nutmeg)*

The presence of Yoga mats are representative of many entangling factors. As mentioned above, they are used to establish personal space. In addition, mats provide a comfortable cushioned base for *āsana* practices that sometimes require individuals to be on their knees or elbows. Further, in standing on a sticky surface placed over smooth flooring,



mats can also be used for safety purposes.

The presence of luxury, synthetic Yoga mats is a recent phenomenon with the first rubber mat being used as a prop by Angela Farmer in 1967 (Cler, 2019). It took a number of years before this prop caught on and became a marketable product within the Yoga community. Their increasing presence can be linked to the growing commercialisation of Yoga and the desire to capitalise on a lucrative niche in the wellbeing and/or spiritual marketplace (Godrej, 2017; Rindfleish, 2005). The Yoga mat industry is expected to become a 14 billion dollar industry in the United States by the end of 2020 (Delaney, 2017). Most experienced Yoga practitioners have at least one personal Yoga mat and many have a few that they use for different purposes (hot Yoga, travel, vinyasa, restorative).

In ancient Yoga, practices were often outdoors and the ground (grass or soil) offered practitioners enough traction to sustain the practices they were moving through. As Yoga continued to expand and moved indoors, animal pelts were used to help prevent slippage. As a practice that prioritises the ethical teaching of ‘non-harm,’ these deer and tiger skins did not remain sustainable nor acceptable to a growing population. Moving into *shalas* (studios), mats consisted of small pieces of fabric and began to resemble the rectangular shapes seen today (Cler, 2019; Liforme, 2019). As Yoga *āsana* practices have continued to expand and include a wider range of challenging movements (including hop backs, inversions, and seated twists), the interest in finding a suitable floor covering shifted.

Yoga mats have evolved through various materials (pelts, cotton, rubber, pvc or vinyl, jute) as they have been adopted amongst an expanding community of practitioners in different socio-economic groupings practicing in a range of studio spaces (Cler, 2019; Liforme, 2019). Today, mats contribute to spiritual consumerism as promoted by large corporations that recognise Yoga as a marketable commodity. Yoga mats, mala beads, Spiritual Gangster t-shirts and luxury ‘athleisure’ brands are all tapping into a growing spiritual consumerism promoting the individualised governance of self-actualisation as something that can be both achieved and supported by the consumption of luxury goods (Lavrence & Lozanski, 2014; Miller, 2016).

Though none of the women demonstrate extreme consumerism through their Yoga lifestyles, they are still greatly impacted by the promotion and sale of Yoga goods. Many of the women mention consumption of goods as something they grapple with as contemporary individuals living amongst capitalist societies whilst embodying ethical Yoga practices that encourage moderation and balance. Yoga's philosophical teachings do not prevent them from having attachments, but they do promote personal reflection around their Yoga artifacts and props. As entangled Yoga bodies, they often mentioned the importance of their material belongings as influential components of their daily Yoga routines. Below Manaia reflects on her connection to the items she uses in her rituals:

*I have attachments, but they are attached to my love of rituals. So...I have a favourite bowl, two favourite cups – one for tea, one for hot coffee and hot chocolates. I have affirmation cards and tarot cards and lots of crystals. So those kind of weekly, monthly, moon phase, seasonal change rituals are deeply important to me. They are steeped with deep personal connection to something bigger than me. So that sense of purpose and ritual, is important to keep me grounded and in tune. (Manaia)*

Contrary to lifestyle research that suggests consumption of goods are based on desires of wanting to fit in with a social identity (Wheaton, 2010), Manaia reveals that she is not attached to these belongings as indicators of belonging in a Yoga culture. Rather, she finds purpose in these articles as components of her rituals that help her to maintain present moment awareness and a sense of connectivity. Many of the practices in Yoga encourage ritual and dedicated repetition. As Manaia indicates, this repetition promotes a relationship with items and an association of dedicated practice with objects of ritual. While many examples could have been chosen to demonstrate a relationship with inanimate materiality (incense, chimes, mala beads, meditation cushions), here, I choose to work with Yoga mats.

In Lewis' (2008) article on meaning and wellness in the "yoga market" (p. 535), she suggests that objects in Yoga practices are intimately related to the experiences the women share with these inanimate goods. She states, "the physical, mental and social are inseparable; the yoga mat is understood as a space to grapple with and dispel

insecurities, practice patience and non-judgment, and release difficult emotions” (Lewis, 2008, p. 541). In my shared experiences with the women, I found that a number of them demonstrated connections with their mats. These complex entanglements and the words used to describe them could be compared to relationships. Thinking about the potential emotional bond between practitioners and mats presented an interesting further affective entanglement to be explored in my creative writing. Below, Aurora refers to practice as time spent with her mat:

*I often over think things. But I find that when I get on my mat, that's all got to go. When I step on my mat, I'm in my breath, and in my body and it's a really good relief. I've trained myself to know that for that time, when I stand on my mat, my purple mat, I just focus on my purple mat. It supports me in letting all that noise disappear. I need that time with my mat.*  
(Aurora)

Beyond the emotional attachment to a Yoga mat, there is a physical intimacy that is shared when moving with a mat. In a daily practice, an entangled Yoga body is pressing against a Yoga mat. As such, there is a wear and tear of the material, a sharing of fluids, and at times skin from the heels or palms are left. Thinking about the parts of the body that are left on the mat and parts of the mat that are imprinting on both the emotional and physical body provides ample material for conceptualising entanglement.

The evocative writing below dives into the complexity of a Yoga practitioner's entangled physical and emotional relationship with their mat(s). I anthropomorphise Yoga mats, suggesting that practitioners' relationships with mats are much more complex than outwardly known. In acknowledging the cultural, social conditioning of an entangled Yoga body, I recognise the added entanglement of expected conformity and pressures facing single women. Writing arises out of my lived experiences with mats. In *My Polyamorous Relationships with Yoga Mats*, I reflect on the many 'relationships' I have had with mats over 20 years of practice, I draw comparisons between my relationships with mats and the complexity of being a single woman in contemporary times:

✱

*My Polyamorous Relationships with Yoga Mats*

✱

*Over the years I have had many mats.*

*I always own one, but this does NOT mean that I am convinced commitment is for me.*

*One mat for the rest of my life? I've never seen it work for anyone, how could it possibly work for me? I'm not convinced, or at least not yet. I do worry that I'm becoming cynical about the longevity of mats so I try to remain open-minded...*

*But c'mon...a lifetime guarantee on an ecomat? Maybe it's possible...I'm doubtful...*

✱

*Thinking back on my relationship history I can clearly see my habitual patterns.*

*I'm not ashamed of my consumption...but I do wonder how much the clever advertising is impacting my purchasing and making it harder for me to settle.*

*I'm a practitioner with many years under my belt...*

*and so...I have had the opportunity to try a few different brands.*

*I try new models in the hope that innovative materials are going to transform my practice...*

*they haven't yet...*

*it's always the same.*

*After a few months each one becomes slightly disappointing to me.*

*But I'm aware of my 'grass is always greener' tendency...*

*awareness is the first step right...?*

✱

*For the past year I have been practicing with a mat that looks great.*

*I found it at a really hip yoga festival and was drawn to it right away.*

*It was the cute design that caught my eye and when I approached the tent the extremely hot (self-professed) 'yoginīs' were all recommending it.*

*They welcomed me into their 'tribe' and I got wrapped up in the moment.*

*It might have been an impulse decision, but it all seemed so fun at the time.*

*One year later... I'm not happy... I mean, the mat still looks great, people are envious of it (they are always asking me where I got it), but the feel under my skin is rough.*

*Sometimes when I do too many sun salutations it tears up my hands.*

*It takes too much of my skin. There is a pain that is associated with this mat that I can't quite resolve. I'm not sure how long I will keep practicing on it.*

✱

*A change has been on my mind for a while now...*

*I'm restless...*

✱

*All of this because I am still pining for that one mat...*

*The one I had when I was living abroad. I remember the day I got it.*

*I found it on Trademe and couldn't believe my luck. It was this amazing brand that is normally super expensive but for some reason this one was being advertised for less than half the price! I immediately messaged the seller...she said I could come check it out anytime so I jumped on the opportunity, took the tube all the way across town, and fell in love...*

*My attachment to that mat was immediate. It was sturdy. The perfect colour: navy. I never slipped on that mat. I looked forward to practicing with my mat every single day. Selling it was a mistake. I can recognise that now. I sold it because I was moving back home and didn't think it would be right to take it with me.*

*I didn't know how good I had it.*

✱

### **Entanglement Three: The heart**

*Maybe you just have to have an open heart to be a yogi. (Aroha)*

The heart, as the final entanglement, is the most complex. Like the previous two examples, the heart was referenced by the women of this research in a wide variety of settings for different purposes. Of course, the heart is an actual organ in the body. It is a fleshy configuration that is pumping blood. However, when the women mentioned the word 'heart' throughout this ethnography, they were not prioritising a detailed description of ventricles. More regularly, insights surrounding the heart were linked to metaphoric and romantic sentiments of love and connection. Interestingly, even alongside reference to the actual organ of the heart, the women extended meaning beyond flesh and form. Below Marina reflects on the heart in Yoga:

*If you are doing any physical exercise your heart beats and there is more flow of blood. The same is true in Yoga. But I think Yoga is different from*

*other activities like running. Yoga doesn't just help your body, it opens up your heart and it makes you a better person. A person practicing Yoga has the wisdom to be kind. With Yoga you will start empathising more because you will have a very different heart structure. If you see someone that is unhappy you will feel it. I think that yoga brings you into the heart point of view. (Marina)*

Marina's example features a number of assumptions, including her belief that heart structures change over time, that Yoga practitioners are more empathic and/or loving due to their open heart, and that Yoga as a practice is always good, kind and loving. Marina's example brings a multitude of confounding entanglements that are all perpetuated in Yoga communities. Ideas around 'open hearts' as more empathetic versus 'closed hearts' as less loving are common in Yoga culture.

Beyond these ideas around Yoga facilitating the development of a more loving individual with an 'open' heart, Yoga practitioners also reference the heart as the space they hope to return to through their continued practices. Interestingly, the word heart is referenced in the title of the only *Yoga sūtras of Patañjali* translation authored by a woman (*The Secret Power of Yoga: A Woman's Guide to the Heart and Spirit of the Yoga sutras*) (Devi, 2010). These ideas of 'returning to the heart' or 'opening the heart' are arguably coming from a good place. Many of the practitioners I speak with (myself included) have become more compassionate individuals through their continued ethical and philosophical practices of Yoga throughout their daily lives. However, this does not change the problematic suggestion that heart and love are similarly experienced by all Yoga practitioners. I challenge this notion that returning to love or the heart is always beneficial in my evocative writing below.

Throughout our shared experiences, many of the women mentioned Yoga practices as methods that could bring them 'back to the heart.' They indicate moving from the heart, listening to the heart and being guided by the heart, and yet, very rarely did their descriptions have anything to do with the powerful muscle beating in their chest. Below, Sophie is reflecting on a journal writing prompt and describes love, authenticity and honesty as qualities that can 'radiate' from the heart:

*The universe is supporting you all the time and taking you out of situations that aren't right and into situations where you can feel more love. So you have to trust... When you gave the writing prompt asking about how Yoga helps us through difficult times, I thought about what I do...and I turn inwards for the answers. Because you might share with 15 people. And 15 people might give you 15 different answers. But only you know what is right in your heart. And so, the Yoga lifestyle is not hard. You move from this place of love and authenticity from your heart. And then people will notice because you are radiating that honesty and that love from a good place. (Sophie)*

Once again, the dominant discourse of Yoga always coming from a 'good' place is mentioned in the quote above. The women in this study are generalising based on their own kind-hearted experiences. Sharing around their experiences of good arising out of their personal Yoga lifestyles reflects their own understandings of kindness, but do not take into account the range of individuals practicing with different intentions. The dominant discourse of Yoga practitioners as always embodying kindness, love, and patience could prevent an honest assessment of a variety of practitioners that are potentially embodying very different motives.

Neglecting to observe the range of problematic teachers and practices that abound within the Yoga community has recently received much publicity through court cases around abuse. One of the most popular Yoga teachers in Aotearoa/New Zealand, Donna Farhi, speaks regularly on the damaging pedagogy perpetuated by male dominance and guru worship that has facilitated abuse in the system of Yoga (Farhi, 2019). While there are many loving individuals practicing Yoga, there are also those whose intentions are not coming from a similar place. A greater criticality that questions the dominant discourse of Yoga as an always loving, always heartfelt, always compassionate practice might greatly benefit the community offering more honesty and accountability.

My shared experiences with the women, alongside my reading of Barad (2007) around the agency of materiality brought me to consider the agency of the heart, not only as an organ pumping blood, but also as a source of love. Love in itself provides individuals with extremely varied experiences that are all contained by a singular umbrella term

(love) that encompasses all caring situations. Beyond this, the vast range of emotional experiences labelled ‘love’ are regularly attributed to the organ of the heart. Often the women’s descriptions of love and heart in this research would present as synonymous. Further, the mention of a connection through a common heart was inclusive of human and non-human entities and this was often linked to feelings (as indicated by the conversation I share with Tara below):

*Allison: What is it about being around the horses that brings the love?*

*Tara: I suppose it is just another form of communication. It’s that retreat from language and humanness. Jumping into that connection and communication with something completely different. Feeling, moving with heart, moving with soul rather than with language, it’s nice.*

In thinking through the multiple ways that the women are entangled as Yoga bodies experiencing the heart as a beating organ while simultaneously attributing the emotions of love, connection and empathy to a common heart, I found much complexity to work with. In my personal reflexive writing, I contemplate the multiple ways that the term love can be interpreted. I had one practitioner tell me that their teacher was amazing because they brought it all back to the ‘heart’ of Yoga.

What is the heart of Yoga? Is it a fleshy pumping organ, an idealised version of love, an objective understanding of bliss states, a heart shape? Does moving from the heart make someone a ‘better’ person? These distinctions are unclear in the women’s continued mention of the heart. As such, these complexities are aspects that I work to unravel through my writing below. In *Coming Back to the Anatomical Heart*, I consider the heart to be a construct that is at the same time animate-inanimate, natural-cultural, material-discursive. The moments illustrated below feature the actual fleshy organ, the emotions of love, the propensity to use language to bypass meaning in spiritual circles and the complexity of thinking through returning to a heart that never actually left the confines of the body:

✱

*Coming Back to the Anatomical Heart*

✱



Friday night at a local cocktail bar chatting about love:

“It’s important not to harden your heart.”

– a dear friend

✱

*I rise with a fright,*

*it’s the middle of the night and I am gasping for air.*

*My chest is tightening and I clasp my heart with both hands.*

*What the... I’m only 32...surely this can’t be a heart attack!*

*I focus my attention towards my breathing.*

*Directing my inhalations into my heart space (aka. lungs), I simultaneously imagine my heart chakra softening and clearing. I visualise the colour green.<sup>24</sup>*

*It all seems a wee bit esoteric but I am terrified and will try anything at this point.*

*Thankfully, I begin to find ease and try to go back to sleep.*

✱

*The next morning I jog down to my local acupuncturist.*

*It’s a local community space and it operates in silence.*

*I take off my shoes, fill out the form and lie in one of the lounge chairs amongst a circle of strangers in various stages of treatment.*

✱

*The acupuncturist approaches me and begins whispering in my ear:*

*“So I read your file... It’s most likely anxiety. Have you tried Yoga?”*

*(I’m too embarrassed to tell him that I have been practicing Yoga for the past 14 years)*

*“Yes I’ve heard it’s helpful,” is all I can muster.*

*He nods gently and begins putting needles in my toes.*

*(Are my toes connected to my heart...? I guess it’s all connected...)*

✱

*As he steps away (remarkably) I can actually feel my heart softening.*

*Oh no... I try to hold back tears but my efforts are futile, I begin to sob relentlessly, it’s a silent space, there are strangers everywhere, and I don’t care...*

*the tears stream down my face.*

✱

Saturday morning in savasana:

“Close your eyes.

---

<sup>24</sup> Green is the colour associated with *Anāhata* (the heart chakra).

Bring your attention to your heart space.

Can you feel your heart beating?

Now extend your attention to your entire body.

Can you feel the gentle pulsations moving through your entire body?

Can you feel your heart beat in your tongue?"

– senior Yoga teacher

✱

*I know this is a technique that is meant to bring my attention to the present moment and to the subtle sensations I can observe in my body. But today it is doing the opposite...*

*I am distracted and agitated. I can't get the image of my heart out of my mind.*

*I envision my actual fleshy, beating heart. I can feel it pulsating and bring the image of it pumping blood through my veins into my mind.*

*My mind whirls...*

*It's not often I just stop and think about the actual organ of the heart...*

*That muscle is keeping me alive!*

*It's tirelessly pumping blood throughout my entire body.*

*It is very rare that I consider this powerful anatomical muscle. What a beast!*

✱

*Wait... my mind has wandered... what was I meant to be doing...?*

*Oh yes... present moment awareness activity...*

*I am meant to be counting heartbeats...*

*I locate my pulse in my tongue...*

*1...2...3...*

✱

Scrolling through Instagram...

a near-naked body is absorbing a beautiful sunset.

The caption reads:

“We are connected through a common heart.

We are all one.

And that oneness is pure love.”

– a ‘Yogalebrity’

✱

*I get what she is talking about.*

*It's a certain euphoria that sometimes happens in meditation.*

*It can also happen out in the world. Experiencing a sun setting over snowy mountain tops, seeing a baby being born...these are moments that connect us and have the potential to bring us to tears... I know that people often call this bliss.*

*(It certainly feels amazing)*

*But is it right to associate this feeling with the heart?*

*And...is this feeling representative of love...?*

✱

*For me, love takes many forms.*

*Sometimes connecting to my heart doesn't feel amazingly blissful.*

*At times, my loving, bleeding heart feels exposed and raw and lonely...  
maybe I'm doing it wrong.*

✱

*The caption offered by this young woman uses the terms love, heart, and bliss synonymously...I'm not convinced. Love and bliss seem fleeting...they aren't tangible.*

*I start to wonder...is it necessary to bring love and emotions into the equation...?*

*Can't we just focus on the heart? The physical organ of the heart is not some fanciful romanticisation of love...it is something real that I can get excited about. That organ is keeping me alive and if that isn't representative of love then I don't know what is.*

*I decide that, for me, Yoga is about appreciating the anatomical heart.*

✱

## **Summary**

In this chapter, I acknowledge the subjectivity of the human body alongside the historical and political formations that influence objects entangling with Yoga bodies. I attempted to demonstrate how using Barad's concept of entanglement can help to broaden discussions around interconnectivity without reducing the importance of historical and political formations. Critiques of feminist new materialisms argue that, in lowering human life to a common materiality, these theories are reductive and apolitical (Braunmühl, 2018; Rekret, 2016). I have attempted to address these concerns by demonstrating how lives can be both entangled and subjective.

Appreciating the range of ways that lived experiences are entangling and mutually implicated with matter places importance on all aspects of lived experience. Living in

entangled Yoga bodies is influencing the ways that these women are interacting with their environments. As the majority of the women revealed through our many conversations on yogic union, after experiencing moments of interconnectivity, they became aware of the concept of mutual implication in their lives. Importantly, a discussion on entanglement also inspires a consideration of the ethical imperative of living in an intricately connected world. The quote below comes from Barad's (2007) book *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, and discusses the importance of ethics as entangled amongst knowing and being in a continual becoming:

What we need is an ethico-onto-epistemology – an appreciation of the intertwining of ethics, knowing and being – since each intra-action matters, since the possibilities for what the world may become call out in the pause that precedes each breath before a moment comes into being and the world is remade again, because the becoming of the world is a deeply ethical matter. (Barad, 2007, p. 185)

Barad suggests that in understanding the intertwining of matter and agentic becoming, considerate individuals are morally obliged to alter their choices throughout daily life. Embodying entanglement may provide a deeper understanding of an inextricable link to all materiality and this, in turn, may influence choices in daily life.

Rekret (2016) argues that in suggesting an ontological inseparability of matter and an expectation of ethical attentiveness, Barad is tying ethical responsibility to ontological speculation. While Rekret may have concrete grounds to assume that Barad's theories are speculation, there is a benefit to considering actions amidst current climate changes and global disasters. While entanglement and interconnectivity may be speculative, there is benefit to reflecting upon political, environmental and social worlds as spaces that are intricately linked. An increasing awareness around potential entanglements could encourage increased compassion for others and care for the environment. As the women of this study illustrate, opportunities to experience moments of entanglement may arrive through a continued dedication to the lifestyle practices of Yoga.

The women of this study provide examples of the many beneficial ways that embodying yogic union can encourage an increased awareness and authenticity (as detailed in

Chapter Four). Understanding a mutually implicated existence in a continual state of becoming fills the women with an awareness of their place amongst this entanglement. Through their experiences embodying entanglement, they understand that their choices are intricately intra-acting with their environment and make attempts at considering their actions. As the Yoga practitioners of this study reveal, living as an entangled Yoga body has the potential to encourage a consideration of ethics through everyday intra-actions. The chapter that follows considers the acts of everyday ethics that the women are arriving to after years of engaging in Yoga lifestyles and discusses their part in the affirmative, ethical becoming of our world.

## Chapter Six: Everyday affirmative ethics

Throughout this chapter I discuss the ways that the women in this study are embodying the ethical practices of Yoga throughout their daily lives. I compare the lifestyles of these contemporary women with previous Yoga lifestyle literature to offer a presentation of Yoga that is led by everyday ethical choices. As illustrated in Chapter Five, after many years of embodying Yoga lifestyles, the women of this study are coming to an understanding of Yoga as union. They are considering their connection with their material world and moving from a place that is informed by their ethical practices. As indicated in the quote from T. below, living contemporary Yoga lifestyles requires mindful consideration of actions and the motivations that inspire them:

*I think definitely part of living a Yoga lifestyle is this whole idea of being good to the world. Knowing your impact and obviously knowing the reasons behind your actions. Being mindful of what you are doing, and how that is affecting everything around you. (T.)*

T.'s description of thoughtfully considering choices in daily life are mirrored by many of the women in this study. Moving alongside the women, I recognised that their lifestyles were extremely varied. However, a feature that offered unity amongst all of the women's daily lives was a consideration of choices based upon the ethical practices of Yoga. Informed by the women's insights and drawing upon recent philosophy from Rosi Braidotti (2018, 2019), I reflect on how the women's contemporary adaptations of ethical Yoga practices amongst daily life resembles Braidotti's (2019) description of a generative life and affirmative ethics. The women's ethical decisions represent a generative becoming of practice that is informed by early Yoga texts and adapted to suit contemporary lives.

The women's embodiment of Yoga practice throughout their daily lives, as ethically-informed everyday choices, provides insight into the ways that today's practitioners are adapting practice and finding meaningful applications in contemporary contexts. The women struggle with ideas around appropriation and critically examine their ethical choices to consider the influence that these acts may have on their communities. In this chapter, I suggest that contemporary Yoga practitioners are demonstrating a style of

activism that is intricately woven into the fabric of their lives as continual, everyday ethics. Further, I suggest that the women's daily lives are contributing to futures that are generative and affirmative. Honouring both past formations and present becomings, the women's daily choices are cumulatively building hopeful futures.

### **Braidotti, generative life and affirmative ethics**

As mentioned in the literature review chapter, Rosi Braidotti (2006, 2011, 2013, 2015, 2016, 2017) is a feminist scholar who writes extensively on posthumanism. Within this particular chapter, I find relevance considering the women of this study as 'posthuman knowing subjects' cultivating a purpose for Yoga through lives that are ethically informed and built upon past and present formations (Braidotti, 2013, 2018). For this discussion, a posthuman knowing subject is defined as a "relational embodied and embedded, affective and accountable entity and not only as a transcendental consciousness" (Braidotti, 2018, p. 31). This distinction has relevance, particularly in relation to Yoga. The women of this study are not considered as transcendent beings reaching for heightened states of individualised enlightenment, removed from the world. Rather, they are individuals immersed in their worlds as conscientious women who understand their influence and are attempting to mindfully consider their actions as they navigate daily life.

This is not the first time that Yoga has been considered alongside Braidotti's work. In a recent study by Buckingham (2017), the practices of Yoga were brought into a dialogue with Braidotti's (2011) nomadic theory to help reconceptualise findings from previous ethnographic work. Buckingham's (2017) discussion offers a reflection in response to previous research and a framework for feminist scholars to consider. The analysis I present in this chapter extends on Buckingham's (2017) insights and uses Braidotti's concepts to rethink women's lived and embodied experiences of Yoga lifestyles. While relational ethics (Ellis, 2007; Noddings, 1984) could be used to describe the women's considerate attempts at moving ethically amongst interpersonal worlds, I found more opportunity to discuss a breadth of influential factors when thinking through the work of Braidotti. I find relevance in working with Braidotti's understanding of ethics as it offers the ability to consider a broader temporality. Her concepts of generative life and affirmative ethics allow this discussion to challenge the linearity of time and highlight

the importance of affect in experiences that are inclusive of more than those contained within the boundaries of the body.

Over the following pages, I focus on a selection of Braidotti's key works that inform the discussion developed within this chapter. In particular, her recent article on affirmative ethics and generative life weaves into a dialogue with the women's experiences in Yoga lifestyles (Braidotti, 2019). When I am talking about generative life and affirmative ethics, I am working with Braidotti's (2019) definition of affirmation in a universe that includes both human and non-human formations. Below, she describes the process of building a generative, affirmative future together:

we're looking at affective, relational and cognitive capacities. Ultimately, they are ontological capacities to open up to the world –or not – to take in the present as the record of what we're ceasing to be, to take on the present as the traces of what we're in the process of becoming. These gestures are collective praxis and together we are capable of reactivating the negative, reworking it, transforming it, reformatting it. (Braidotti, 2019, p. 474)

Braidotti (2019) takes into consideration both past and present as cumulatively influencing the process of becoming, further, she suggests that gestures of affirmation can transform the world. Connecting Braidotti's (2019) affirmative ethics and generative life to the lived experiences of contemporary Yoga lifestyle practitioners has relevance considering the ancient lineage of Yoga lifestyle practices. Revealing which practices are gaining relevance, which are being left behind and how the women of this study are adapting and adopting Yoga ethics within their lives, I build a cartography of Yoga. Understanding how these women are finding relevance in the ancient teachings of Yoga in contemporary times offers insight into the ways that practitioners are claiming and releasing Yoga lifestyle teachings to generate contemporary meanings towards future becomings (Braidotti, 2019).

## **A cartography of Yoga**

As mentioned above, contemplating the past helps to inform the present. Rosi Braidotti's (2019) recent work describes life as a generative experience that is



influenced by past discursive formations arising amongst a present that is in continual motion. Her description of a generative life alludes to a becoming that is influenced by a range of formations. These are both human and non-human, natural and cultural, discursive and material. As mentioned previously, descriptions of Braidotti's (2019) generative life could be compared to Barad's (2007) concept of entanglement. Both consider material and discursive formations and the mutual implication of an interaction between all entities that are both human and non-human. For this chapter, I choose to situate this analysis amongst the work of Braidotti (2013, 2018, 2019) as her discussions of this mutually implicated becoming often centre around knowledges.

Considering the teachings of Yoga lifestyles to be generative, I reflect on how multiple knowledge sources are cumulatively influencing the women's lived experiences. From ancient texts to contemporary sources, there are many past and present formations that are considered when the women are making decisions around their lifestyle practices. Teachings that the women are engaging with are both old and new, discursive and embodied. I offer the quote below from Braidotti (2019) to demonstrate the importance of both the past and the present as embedded influences on lived experiences:

So what year is this, exactly, and what are we at? If you are trying to do a cartography in the sense of a record of what we are ceasing to be, of the eternal feminine under the aegis of patriarchy – what year are we in? None and all – a thousand years of oppression and struggle for liberation, a thousand plateaus of movements and counter-movements. This is emancipation as the actualisation of the virtual past, an idea that never quite made it but never quite died, either. Completely present, completely antiquated, completely part of a present that is trying to become actual – a sort of never-dead, always about to burst into life. (p. 468)

Braidotti's (2019) description of this moment in time as “completely present, completely antiquated” (p. 468), highlights the importance of all moments in time convening in the present as never actually solidified, but in a perpetual state of letting go and becoming. In thinking about the teachings of Yoga, a lengthy historical past and varied contemporary sources are continually generating through the women practitioners' choices as they embody practice.

For example, dominant discursive formations around what constitutes authenticity in Yoga are vast and continue to influence practitioners (as discussed in Chapter Four) (Godrej, 2017; Maddox, 2015; Markula, 2014; Miller, 2016). Today, women are making new meanings for the practices of Yoga amongst their daily lives and these relate to how they understand authenticity. They are navigating past and present formations to generate new understandings and this process is in continual motion. Considering which practices retain relevance and which have been left behind indicates the values that practitioners are finding most meaningful in Yoga lifestyles suited for contemporary times.

Thinking of the past as embedded in the generative life of a posthuman knowing subject practicing Yoga, it is interesting to consider the ways that women practitioners are bringing the ancient teachings to life in contemporary times. As mentioned in the literature review chapter of this thesis, the teachings of Yoga date back to ancient Indian texts (Davies, 2013; Jain, 2014; White, 2012). The women of this study have different thoughts around ancient Yoga wisdom. A number of the practitioners mention the importance of returning to ancient teachings for guidance. However, the majority of the women further describe the necessary expansion and adaptation of Yoga's guidelines as new populations of students adopt practices and translate them in ways that are relevant in their particular contexts.

Tensions experienced by Yoga practitioners while navigating multiple knowledge sources has been documented in other research settings (Lea, Philo & Cadman, 2016). When adapting teachings, the women in this study similarly mention their struggles as they consider to what extent their translations of practices might be considered appropriation. They are aware of the connection to an Indian lineage and aspire to be respectful in their application of Yoga. Although many of the women confess that they do not have the answers, they are aware that the tensions surrounding the issue of cultural appropriation in Yoga are both unresolved and ongoing (Maddox, 2015; Miller, 2016; Vertinsky, 2015). This is discussed in more detail in a later portion of this chapter.

A cartography of Yoga that is generative respects historical lineage whilst acknowledging a process of becoming for teachings that have evolved over time. The quote from T. below, arises out of a conversation on the challenges she experiences in

her community when individuals insist on literal translations of ancient texts being practiced in contemporary times. In our discussion, T. sees the value in learning from the lessons contained in ancient texts while remaining cognisant that they were written amongst very different societal settings. Below, T. warns against attaching to teachings that were written in different times and instead, suggests that there is benefit in allowing the application of wisdom to continually evolve so that the lessons remain relevant in different contexts:

*I think the challenges come when we take those old texts completely literally and forcefully apply them to today's world. I mean, when those texts were written it was in a certain time frame, there was a context for why they were written. Beyond this, because they have been interpreted for years, this means that you'll have one interpretation, and I'll have another interpretation...because we've grown up in different ways. So, what influences us differs, and what we think is different. So, in order for old texts to remain relevant they have to grow and mold. (T.)*

Moving alongside contemporary Yoga practitioners gives insight into the ways that these women are allowing the ethical teachings of Yoga to evolve alongside a changing world. While many of the women mentioned being excited by the potential contained in an expanding understanding of Yoga practices, another group expressed concerns around the extent to which this adaptation might move too far away from 'traditional' intentions. This contrast between ancient traditionalism and contemporary adaptation provides a tension that the majority of the women in this study are struggling to navigate. Tensions between 'traditional' and 'contemporary' have been discussed throughout this thesis, here I expand to consider this point in relation to the application of Yoga's ethical teachings in everyday life. Below, Sophie works through her thoughts on this as she describes shifting interpretations of Yoga using the analogy of a cappuccino:

*I was talking to a friend the other day and they were saying, "Yoga should be practiced like this..." But I was thinking, Italians drink their cappuccinos in the morning and only in the morning. But now, cappuccinos are everywhere and people in the rest of the world drink them*

*whenever they like...and they still call it a cappuccino. The traditional Italians laugh when foreigners drink cappuccinos in the afternoon, they are like... “what are you doing?” If you ask for a cappuccino in Italy in the afternoon they look at you like you’re crazy. But it’s still a cappuccino, it’s still fluffy, there is still caffeine, it is still in a cup. Just because it’s not done the same way, or it’s not keeping to the tradition of where it comes from and so some people start to scoff and say, “oh it’s different and it can’t possibly be called the same name” and I’m like...I don’t know...(pause). (Sophie)*

Sophie’s analogy suggests an acceptance of adaptation, and yet, in my field notes I observed a brief pause after this description and a moment of reflection. Her gentle pause for reflection at the end of this quote suggests a hesitation before claiming any certainty around adaptation. There are many unresolved questions around the evolution of Yoga and the women of this study are continually reflecting on this without a solution. Like many of the women, Sophie is critically examining her choices, she takes time to consider her thoughts around adaptation of practice in her contemporary lifestyle.

Many of the women are adapting and adopting the teachings of Yoga to suit contemporary times, and as mentioned previously, their ideas around practices to include in a Yoga lifestyle find inspiration in ancient Yoga texts that have been translated and passed down over thousands of years. As mentioned in Chapter One, ethics guide moral decisions in daily life. The majority of the women in this study obtain moral guidance through the ethical teachings of the *Yoga sūtras of Patañjali* (Devi, 2010; Satchidananda, 1978). Due to the popularity and significance of the ethical practices contained in the *Yoga sūtras*, both for the women of this study and the Yoga culture generally, I chose to centre this discussion around this moral code. Many of the women mentioned finding solace in being able to take guidance from the *Yoga sūtras*, as a text with a lineage that remains potent for today’s practitioners. Below, Winifred reflects on the solace she finds in a practice that has survived many thousands of years:

*I think that there is something in Yoga that offers you that connection to something. I really want to...or...I do believe in the kind of essence, or the*

*history, or the solidness of the practice. It's been around a long time, you know? And that doesn't immediately mean you have to say that it is a perfect practice. But immediately I think, therein lies something that works. Yeah...it is so old. And there are so many tools, so many subtle tools, and so many gross tools as well, you know? The postures, the rest, even the breath work is incredibly subtle. I just think...in Yoga I trust. (Winifred)*

In the quote above, Winifred suggests that the history of Yoga, and its continued relevance amongst contemporary worlds, are indicative that it is a practice that 'works.' Assuming that a historical lineage of a teaching indicates an 'essential' or 'ultimate' truth and deserves blind faith may be problematic without engaging criticality (Lea, 2009). Bringing consideration to practices being applied in contemporary settings is beneficial to ensure that damaging interpretations do not imprint onto today's Yoga bodies. For example, teachings around discipline and extreme measures of self-governance could be problematic for women immersed amongst communities that idolise certain body types over others (Lea, Philo & Cadman, 2016; Leledaki, 2014; Markula, 2014). Thankfully, the women of this study, including Winifred, all demonstrate critical thinking around their application of practices. This consideration has been developed after years of prioritising practices for increasing awareness.

As practitioners embodying Yoga at this precise moment in time, the women of this study have embodied understandings related to the present challenges they face. Throughout this ethnographic study, I utilised the opportunity to gain insight into ancient teachings that retain the most significance for contemporary women practitioners. In this chapter, I draw comparisons between ancient and contemporary translations of the *Yoga sūtras* to illustrate their generative becoming over time. I present a number of generative, affirmative ethical practices drawing on the lived experiences of the women practitioners in this embodied ethnography. Understanding how these ethical teachings are embedded and embodied throughout the women's contemporary lifestyles offers insight into the ways that Yoga is both antiquated and becoming in its ongoing adaptation.

## Generative, affirmative ethics

In this chapter, I aim to reveal how the women of this study are adopting and adapting the ethical teachings of Yoga for contemporary times. Through their examples, I suggest that they are contributing to a continual process of affirmative reframing whereby ancient translations are made meaningful through newly defined, positive interpretations. Before moving into the specific description of generative ethical practices from the *Yoga sūtras*, I reflect on the importance of affirmative reframing. In contemporary times, the women of this study are reconceptualising ancient teachings. In relation to application of practice, they are considering how ‘care’ might be equally as important as ‘discipline’ as a guiding principle for Yoga lifestyle choices. Below, I offer a quote from Sophie as she reflects on the importance of trying to practice more self-care after years of practicing extreme discipline:

*Living a Yoga lifestyle you will find that you'll be more balanced. For the first 25 years of my life, I was living with so much discipline. And my father was very disciplined. As an athlete, I was raised in that environment, and it took me many years to realise that it (discipline) is not all there is. Life is all about the balance between love and discipline. You've got to love yourself too – you can't just beat yourself up. So I had to learn to let go and to lean towards compassion. And you have to experience both ends, and then...you know...not get too deeply into one or the other. Maybe you can love yourself too much...I don't know...but everyone's journey is different. So, not everyone's will be on the discipline and compassion spectrum. But if I had to really summarise the lesson that I've learnt all these years of my life, I think this is what I was supposed to be learning. And hopefully I am on that right journey...When I'm standing at the pearly gates, I think I will understand that in this lifetime, I needed to learn to be nice to myself. (Sophie)*

Sophie is reframing her intention in practice from discipline to love. Examples from many of the women demonstrate this shift towards more positive intentions guiding their practices (this is expanded below). Moving towards more affirmative ethical Yoga lifestyles is potentially shifting the dominant discursive formation of Yoga as an

extremely disciplined practice, to Yoga as ethical practices that can encourage more balance. As Sophie mentions, sometimes it takes a swing in the opposite direction to find that space where a balance can be achieved.

In contemporary Yoga lifestyle practices, the women are adapting translations of teachings to swing the pendulum of discipline back towards more caring interpretations. The importance of discipline in Yoga can be observed in the ways that the names for the categories of ethical practices (*yamas* and *niyamas*) are variously translated in contemporary publications that are interpreting the teachings of ancient Yoga texts. Language used in these translations include words like abstinence, control and restraint (Desikachar, 1995; Satchidananda, 1978).

Recommending that Yoga practitioners must practice extreme restraint to obtain liberation is an old (albeit powerful) discursive formation around discipline that remains present in contemporary Yoga (Bailly, 2014; Cowans, 2106; Lea, 2009; Lea, Philo & Cadman, 2016; Miller, 2016). While discipline may still be influencing practitioners, importantly, the women of this study indicate a positive reframing of the teachings that brings them more ease in the application of practices throughout their daily lives. In this thesis, I translate the ethical teachings as reflections of authenticity (*yamas*) and affirmative actions (*niyamas*). These interpretations differ from those offered above, and while these subtle shifts in wording may seem inconsequential, they are shifting how practices are being applied. Varied and subtle differences in words used to translate *Sanskrit* terminology over time, as informed by the embodied experiences of contemporary practitioners, present important insights when attempting to understand the generative and affirmative becoming of Yoga lifestyles.

### ***Different words in different worlds***

As demonstrated above, being informed by women's embodied experiences in contemporary Yoga inspires new definitions of teachings in ancient Yoga texts. The translations that I have prioritised throughout this thesis are interpretations that developed after analysing the women's lived experiences. The women's translations, as offered throughout this thesis, highlight the generative understandings that have accumulated over the course of this study.

Definitions used in Figure 1 reflect my understandings at the beginning of this thesis. Prior to moving alongside the women, I drew my knowledge of Yoga's ethical teachings from the *Yoga sūtra* translation I was familiar with (Satchidananda, 1978) and my experiences embodying practice. After moving alongside the women of this study, the ethical practices I found to be most influential and the words I was using to translate them, shifted. These changes indicate the growth in my understanding as inspired by the insights of the women in this study. In the sections that follow, I feature specific ethical teachings contained in the *Yoga sūtras of Patañjali* and describe how the women are affirmatively reframing them to suit their contemporary lives. The women offer examples of affirmative ethical practices that are in a state of continual becoming through their lived experiences in Yoga. As they continue the process of working alongside the teachings, the women practitioners are demonstrating an affirmative reframing that is contributing to a swing towards more considered and relevant applications of Yoga throughout their daily lives.

For the purposes of this chapter, I am focusing on ethical practices from the *Yoga sūtras of Patañjali* that arose as dominant themes for the women of this study. I begin each section with Nischala Joy Devi's (2010) definition of each ethical practice. As mentioned previously, her translation is the only one by a woman to date and her translations offer further material for discussion as they too vary from those written by men. This variation was briefly mentioned in the literature review chapter and will be discussed in more detail below.

Informed by Devi's (2010) translations, I demonstrate how contemporary practitioners are finding relevance for ancient teachings amongst their contemporary daily lives. Weaving her interpretations into a discussion on the affirmative and generative becoming of Yoga practices, I consider how these descriptions are also subject to change as teachings that are existing in a state of perpetual motion. Examples of generative and affirmative ethical practices that have been adopted to suit contemporary lives and remain particularly relevant amongst the lives of the women in this study include: *ahimsā*, *saucha* and *santoshā*. It is important to mention that these ethical practices represent only a selection of the teachings that the women were engaging with throughout their daily lives. Any one of the ten ethical teachings of Yoga could have been discussed in this chapter, I choose these three as they were most regularly



mentioned by the majority of the women.

### ***Ahimsā* (Kindness)**

Embracing the great virtue of *Ahimsā* (reverence and love for all) brings the knowledge that each of us feels pain, joy, disappointment, love – the full spectrum of emotions. We develop an empathy with others and our individual experience becomes the experience of all. (Devi, 2010, p. 180)

The translation for *ahimsā* in Figure 1 is ‘non-harm.’ This translation came from Satchidananda’s (1978) interpretation. In comparison, the wording that I arrived at after my entangled ethnographic experiences with the women, and as used throughout my writing in this thesis, is ‘kindness.’ Although kindness and non-harm are comparable, they are subtly different. Reframing *ahimsā* through the use of language that encourages affirmative action and empathy over negative assessment contributes towards futures that are kind. In this move of reframing from negative to affirmative, the women are building an ethical Yoga practice that allows them the opportunity to embody positive values built on love and kindness rather than non-violence and non-harm.

Prioritising affirmative language could be seen as inconsequential and recent research on positive reframing suggests these techniques could present a gateway to bypassing the spectrum of experiences in daily life (Hoffman, 2012; Leledaki, 2014; Sherrell & Simmer-Brown, 2017). However, through the experiences of these women moving in the world, I have come to see the benefit in utilising affirmative translations. Through their use of the words ‘love’ and ‘kindness,’ as opposed to ‘non-violence’ and ‘non-harm,’ their application of *ahimsā* is enabling the women to connect rather than chastise.

Braidotti (2019) suggests that “what is affirmative about affirmation is that it increases our ability to relate and take in the world. It doesn’t diminish you. It enhances you.” (p. 474). Shifting the translation of *ahimsā* from non-harm to “reverence and respect for all ... people, animals, plants and inanimate objects” (Devi, 2010, p. 178), practitioners open themselves to the affirmative ways that they are able to connect. Changing the translation of *ahimsā* from non-harm to kindness is a subtle but potent shift that is altering how the women are applying this practice in their daily lives. It allows

practitioners to move away from worrying about self-monitoring harmful tendencies and towards the potential for increasing empathy and love for all (Devi, 2010).

Below, Jyoti describes her process of moving from a very strict adaptation of *ahimsā* as ‘non-harm’ towards a more fluid interpretation of ‘love.’ She reflects on how this shift in translation has brought her more ease in her Yoga lifestyle practices. When worrying about harming (even while breathing), she found no end to the restrictions she was placing on herself. As a result of feeling overwhelmed, Jyoti shifted her thinking around the wording of *ahimsā*:

*I realise that when I was living a very strict yogi life, I was making myself miserable. I was taking it way too far and it just became like an obsession. I remember talking about non-harm and I was like...who am I to say that the life of bacteria is lesser than a dog. Or, who am I to say that the life of a dog is more important than a chicken. Or then, who am I to even say that the life of a plant is more important than an animal. I started thinking about each life, each sentient being, as equally important. So even when I am eating vegetables I am killing. No matter what, I can't be free from harm. I started thinking that even when I'm breathing I am killing, and with that realisation I stopped being so strict with myself. Today, I just try the best that I can to be a good human being, and be honest with my heart. I just try to love and care as much as I can today. And maybe today I can only love this much, and maybe tomorrow I can love a little bit more. But that's okay because I am sincerely, conscientiously trying my best and that is a yogi life. (Jyoti)*

Jyoti reflects sentiments of many of the women. They are working with the teachings of Yoga and are informed by the ancient texts but are building new meanings in ways that can bring them more ease. Similar to the ways that the women of this study are reconceptualising ‘authenticity’ through their Yoga lifestyle journeys (as described in Chapter Four), their understandings around the reframing of ethical practices are arising after many years committing to the teachings of Yoga. Many of the women describe this process of reframing as a continual becoming that requires regular reflection.

The women Yoga practitioners of this study are not enlightened in the stereotypical sense presented through discursive formations around ‘yogis’ (Cowans, 2016; Lewis, 2008; Tichenor, 2007). They are, however, living in ways that are thoughtful and ethically-informed. Their consistent and continual efforts to be kind and considerate demonstrate a space for Yoga in contemporary times as practices that can encourage individuals to practice affirmative ethics throughout daily life. Importantly, the women also regularly admit their limitations and express humility around their continual process of learning alongside attempts to live ethically. Below, Nutmeg reflects on her practices of kindness but acknowledges that, although she is trying to be more kind throughout her daily life, she still has the ability to be judgemental:

*That’s the whole Yoga thing, you know? Just being nice, just not being nasty. I think this is the nice thing about Yoga, you know? For me, at least, just taking the time for myself enables me to be nicer to people. I mean, it could be different for everyone. But for me, Yoga helps me to be less reactive, less judgey. Even though I’m still really judgey, but is that just human nature? (Nutmeg)*

Reflecting on practices of kindness, Nutmeg admits that she still has tendencies to be reactive and judgemental. Her question, “is that just human nature?” (Nutmeg), reflects a candid concern about authenticity in this quote. She situates herself as a human who similarly struggles alongside other humans amongst a process of continual inquiry. Her attempts at maintaining her affirmative ethical Yoga practices throughout daily life do not magically transform her into an individual who is without fault. Rather, she mentions that her practice of being nice is something that is cultivated and maintained through practices that allow her time to process. As this conversation continues, Nutmeg mentions the importance of her daily rituals of self-care that help her to maintain the attributes of kindness she prioritises in her life.

The women use a range of terms to describe *ahimsā*. These include (but are not limited to), love, kindness, empathy and compassion. While all of the words infer slightly different meanings, overall, the women demonstrate an interest in monitoring their behaviour and express the importance of continual awareness, self-monitoring and effort towards being more kind in their lives. Below, Aurora mentions the importance of

taking time to reflect as offering her the opportunity to choose her everyday ethical lifestyle practices with more care:

*I try to get a physical practice in, I try and get a meditation in, because I find I am a lot more peaceful, calm and connected at the end. And then, I'm in a better position to approach whatever I am faced with. I'm better able to accept stuff that happens, stuff that might otherwise unbalance me or make me frustrated or something. With Yoga, I constantly question the way I'm approaching things. It's that, 'are you approaching things from a place of consideration and kindness?' Just asking myself, 'how are you approaching this?' (Aurora)*

As illustrated throughout this section, and described by Aurora, the women of this study are continually assessing and reflecting upon their daily lives. Their efforts towards embodying affirmative ethics are embedded throughout their daily lives and this process is not linear. Braidotti (2019) reflects on the process of adopting an affirmative ethic. Her description mirrors the experiences of the women in this study, “one step forward and two steps back? More like a thousand zigzagging detours that bring repetitions to bear on our ethical orientations at any point in time” (p. 468).

### ***Saucha* (Simplicity)**

Through simplicity and continual refinement (*Saucha*), the body, thoughts, and emotions become clear reflections of the Self within. *Saucha* reveals our joyful nature, and the yearning for knowing the self blossoms. (Devi, 2010, p. 206)

The ethical teaching of *saucha*, like many of Yoga's ethical teachings, has been translated in very different terms. Satchidananda (1978) writes how, by observing purity and after purification, the practitioner experiences “disgust for one's own body and for contact with other bodies” (p. 142). This is a very different interpretation from Devi's (2010) description of practicing simplicity to reveal a “joyful nature” (p. 206) and this contrast provides ample material for a critical discussion that surrounds the control of women's bodies through publications that encourage dissatisfaction. This is further

complicated as Satchidananda (1978) continues:

When saucha, or purity, is observed, it makes you feel that even your own body is impure. Every minute there are secretions. Impurities are eliminated every second. The breath pours out carbon gas. The skin discharges perspiration. If we really think about it, it seems to be a very dirty place in which we live. (p. 142)

Describing the body as ‘dirty’ or ‘impure’ in a popular publication on Yoga can influence how women practitioners think about their bodies. As revealed by Roy (2013) in her study on lesbian surfers, dominant discursive formations around bodies as disgusting or desirable can complicate how women experience movement practices. Encouraging dissatisfaction with the body and promoting discipline as a way to find empowerment through bodily control are powerful discursive formations promoted in both Yoga and fitness communities (Lea, 2009; Markula, 2003). In recent ethnographic research on Yoga, discussions around the body are considering the ways that leaky, complex, knowledgeable bodies can expand understandings of lived experience. For example, Atkinson’s (2017) ethnographic writing on sweat and Popovic’s (2012) auto and sensory ethnographic writing that features embodied ways of knowing. These publications are disrupting discursive formations of bodies as malleable objects that require continued surveillance and discipline.

In this section, as informed by the women of this study, I find relevance in Devi’s (2010) definition of *saucha* as simplicity. The women of this study mention the importance of finding simplicity throughout their daily lives as a way to balance the demands of their fast-paced existences. Below, Marina suggests that individuals living Yoga lifestyles are prioritising simplicity:

*The life that a Yogi lives is more simple, I can see that in my teachers. The more you simplify your life, the less complicated your life will be. Now what is simplification of life? It is simple habits, you don’t need any particular habit, just exist. Make it as simple as possible. You can have simple food, it doesn’t have to be certain foods that are fancy...and simplicity in your clothes, simple thinking, simple everything. I’m not*

*saying simple means not wearing anything or not doing anything or not having nice meals, but just paying attention to why you are choosing things. So, in Yoga practices, not doing what everyone else is doing just because they are doing it. You don't have to be standing on your head or your hands to prove your Yoga ability. You just start simplifying your life. Inhaling, exhaling. (Marina)*

In Marina's example above, and in the quote by Devi (2010) at the start of this section, simplicity is considered to be an ethical practice that requires reflection. In Marina's description, living a simple life does not require removal from the world nor does it involve abstinence from all pleasure. Rather, living a simple life can be joyful and inclusive of a wide variety of experiences but each choice is considered and excess is reflected upon. In many of the women's descriptions of simplicity, they attributed these considerations of simplifying their lives to giving them more access to space and time where they could increase their awareness. Below, Marama reflects on her living situation and considers how this may be contributing to the knowledge she is gaining through her Yoga practices:

*I live in a very humble little home that is off the grid. So, it's solar powered and we collect rain water for drinking. A very basic living, and it's at the bottom of the mountain, and it's overlooking the ocean, and there's not really any neighbours. So, I guess I'm lucky in that way...perhaps I have an easier time or easier access to that space and time to allow for sense of self. I guess if I didn't have those elements in my life, if I was in a city with neighbours, or if my life was louder, then it would probably just be a little bit more effort to access that union we were talking about. (Marama)*

Not all of the women in this study live in remote locations. Many of them live in the city limits and are surrounded by neighbours and noise. However, similar to Marama and regardless of their living situations, they mention the importance of simplifying their lives to allow more opportunities to reflect and just be. These are important aspects of the women's daily lives that require considered effort. In contemporary times, values of achievement and outward displays of effortlessly managing busy schedules are

influencing women (McRobbie, 2015; Rottenberg, 2018). The practitioners of this study offer an alternative to the value of ‘busy’ in the ways that they prioritise calm and make considered efforts to locate space in the day to simply exist.

### ***Santosha* (Active acceptance)**

When at peace and content with oneself and others (*Santosha*), supreme joy is celebrated...With this attitude, all things that come and go do not have the opportunity to override our joy. Instead they metamorphose into stillness and peace. (Devi, 2010, p. 211)

The practice of *santosha* was included in my original image depicting (what I thought would be) the most important aspects of an entangled ethnography (see Figure 1). However, at the end of this research, the women’s experiences predominantly featured practices around the theme of acceptance. Both Satchidananda (1978) and Devi (2010) translate *santosha* as ‘contentment,’ however, in this discussion, I combine the women’s experiences to build a cumulative definition of *santosha* as ‘active acceptance.’ Below, Breeze reflects on her journal entries and describes her understanding of *santosha*. In reflecting on *santosha*, she considers how this practice is helping her to be more present in her life:

*Santosha is a theme that is coming up a lot in my journaling. Just that contentment and acceptance, just be and let be. Try not to fight with things, accept things as they are. I am fine. What is – is. Then, I can let go of all that clutter in my mind and just be present. Be aware of what I am doing, fully aware. This helps me to enjoy what I am doing, but I am not grasping to it, or trying to make it other than what it is. I don’t have to be caught up in that. I just participate and do what I can with things exactly as they are. There is no forcing things to be as I want them to be, there is just being.*  
(Breeze)

Importantly, in Breeze’s description of *santosha* she is not choosing acceptance as a practice that absolves her from action. On the contrary, in observing life exactly as it is arising, she acknowledges being able to respond to life exactly as it is presenting itself.

Her description of acceptance as a practice that can promote conscientious action relates to Braidotti's (2019) description of a generative life. In a generative life, Braidotti suggests acknowledging the challenges present in each moment and advises using these issues to ignite creative solutions and actions towards affirmative becoming.

Contemporary women practitioners are informed by many practices that are combining to build a generative understanding of Yoga's ethical teachings as multi-faceted moral codes that are guiding their lived experiences. As mentioned in Chapter One, the *Yoga sūtras of Patañjali* present ten ethical practices: *ahimsā*, *satya*, *asthēya*, *brahmacharya*, *aparigraha*, *saucha*, *santosha*, *tapas*, *svadhyaya*, *ishvara pranidhana* (see Appendix 1 for translations) (Devi, 2010). The women of this study are aware of the ethical practices of the *Yoga sūtras* and understand that these are distinct practices with separate meanings, however, not all of the teachings bare equal importance in the women's lives.

This finding does not indicate a lack of care or understanding. Rather, it indicates that these practitioners are finding more relevance in some of the teachings over others. Additionally, although the women of this study understand that there ten separate practices that comprise the ethical teachings of Yoga, the ways that they are applying these throughout their daily lives are often cumulative. After years of moving and exploring alongside the ethical practices of Yoga, they are embodying a generative range of moral teachings throughout their daily lives. Below, Kakini reflects on her years spent engaging with the practices of Yoga and describes how they are contributing towards an affirmative becoming that encourages her to be more tolerant as she ages:

*So I think I've probably softened around the edges. I was becoming a bit of a hardened woman. So yeah, Yoga helps me to be more tolerant. More tolerant, more accepting, and that's quite good at this time. Because, when you get older sometimes you haven't got patience for things...or you get set in your ways, you know? Yeah, so now I can listen to people who are complaining about stuff and I can stop and be like, well...actually...maybe you can approach things in a different way. (Kakini)*



Like many of the women, Kakini understands that her ethically-informed, Yoga lifestyle practices are having a cumulative effect on her lived experiences. Following ethical guidelines, embodying philosophy in movement practices and living as women that are working and surviving in contemporary times, the women are building multi-faceted Yoga lifestyles. As demonstrated by these women practitioners, the specific actions they are taking in their lives are not the result of living ‘the’ contemporary Yoga lifestyle but illustrate how ethically-informed choices based on a similar moral code can support affirmative futures.

While this acceptance of adaptation and flexibility of application amongst a variety of lifestyles is encouraging for populations of practitioners interested in attempting to begin practicing Yoga, I return to the topic of appropriation to reflect on the ways that the women of this study are navigating the felt tensions they experience whilst adapting and adopting Yoga in their communities.

## **Rethinking the appropriation of Yoga**

The above generative, affirmative ethical practices of contemporary practitioners demonstrate an evolution of practice. The translations that accompany the ethical practices of Yoga are shifting to accommodate for contemporary practitioners. However, the discursive formation of ‘traditional’ Yoga as a more ‘genuine’ practice that retains a connection to a timeless, ancient Indian lifestyle still influences contemporary practitioners (Maddox, 2015). Though the women are aware of the need to alter practices to suit their lives, their struggles to resolve the tensions they experience when making personalised adaptations are continual.

In recent years, the wellness industry has been criticised for the “appropriation and commodification of non-Western religious and cultural practices as ‘soul treatments’” (Gill & Orgad, 2018, p. 488). In Yoga culture, Miller (2016) states, “the appropriation process decontextualizes and eliminates the radical nature of systemic cultural critique inherent in the movement” (p. 12). While there may be potential for the practices of Yoga to become methods for escaping challenges (Leledaki, 2014), I find that the women of this study are remaining critical and conscientious in their application of Yoga throughout their daily lives. Rogers (2006) describes how cultural appropriation is

inescapable in our contemporary world, but acknowledges that not all acts of appropriation are equal. Formations of power and oppression have unique histories that differ between cultures, and as such, the variation in ethical and political considerations when applying practices requires much care and continual critical evaluation (Rogers, 2006).

Discussions around cultural appropriation are issues that the women of this study are cautiously navigating. Through the women's continual, critical analysis of this tension, I would argue that they are making considered attempts to address any issues of appropriation through their applications of teachings in their communities. The women in this study demonstrate concern when describing appropriation and are making continual attempts to establish practices with as much care and respect possible. For Robin, this included not saying *namasté* when teaching Yoga. In one of our conversations Robin states, "I have actually moved away from saying it (*namasté*) at the end of class, sometimes I use it as a greeting but then I'm like why? I feel like it's not me." The ways that the women are approaching and managing these tensions differ. The women and I regularly discussed the concept of a 'traditional' Yoga and the potential for appropriation. In the quote below, Michael demonstrates how her awareness of this issue is ongoing and unresolved:

*Well I have been thinking recently about this idea that there is a contemporary type of Yoga as opposed to a traditional type. And I got to thinking about so many of us, including you and me. I mean, we are living in very different places and cultures. And so many people around the world are living so differently and practicing so differently, and that is part of our reality today. We are influenced by so many different things. I mean, once upon a time people might have stayed in one place or maybe they had the same job forever but it's not like that anymore and maybe that has an influence on things too. So, in thinking on what yoga is, and what traditional is, I guess I start thinking about which tradition they are talking about. Because today, we are taking parts from here and there. I look at people like Paul Grilley<sup>25</sup> who is inspired by teachings from China.*

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<sup>25</sup> Paul Grilley is an international Yoga teacher who developed a style of Yoga named Yin. (Grilley, 2012). Yin is a practice that combines ancient Chinese meridian and contemporary anatomy principles.

*I mean, is drawing from those traditions more valid? Can we draw from trainings from within our fitness background? Where is the line drawn between traditional and contemporary and is one more valid than the other? (Michael)*

Michael describes the complexity of considering appropriation and borrowing or gaining inspiration from a range of cultures. The concepts of appropriation and being inspired by cultural traditions result in discussions with no definite answers. Like Michael, some of the women express continued tensions around the appropriation of Yoga in Western, contemporary spaces. The practitioners sit at different places along a continuum of tension. For one of the women, this awareness led to designing a unique style of practice that is inspired by a range of cultural influences. Below, I present the journey of Aroha as she navigates designing teachings that are inspired by the practices of Yoga, her cultural heritage and ancient Egyptian knowledges. Through her considered approach she is finding a mutually beneficial synergy of practice and is able to offer her community a version of the practices she has greatly benefitted from in her life.

I highlight Aroha's journey in designing a generative and accessible Yoga practice to illustrate how she is conscientiously bringing together multiple sources of knowledge to support her as she teaches classes in her community. In comparing complex Yoga theories to concepts that are already embodied by the community she is teaching within, she is making Yoga more accessible for a wider population of individuals. Aroha uses a blend of multiple languages and provides free (or reasonably priced) classes. In her own way, she is finding opportunities to expand accessibility so that individuals in her community can experience Yoga. Aroha's experiences illustrate how it is possible to accommodate for multiple knowledges amongst lifestyle practices that encourage increased awareness and interconnectivity.

In my methodology section, I mentioned the importance of entangling varied sources of knowledge that can build upon and strengthen understandings of lived experience (Barad, 2007; Buckingham, 2017; Ergas, 2014; Morley, 2008). For Aroha, the blending of multiple knowledge sources (Egyptian, Māori, and Yoga), helps to inform her daily ethical practices as she shares Yoga with her community. Beyond this, she has

personally experienced benefits living a Yoga lifestyle and acknowledges the need to diversify perceptions around who can practice Yoga:

*If I'm talking with my Māori community, they understand the concepts because it's actually – you know – the whole spiritual and the ancient and things like that – that's something we understand. But, if I use the word Yoga, it's a turnoff for them immediately. It's because they associate Yoga with skinny, fit, fair-skinned people and they feel that it shuts them out. And so part of me, of my journey with Yoga, is actually about reconnecting. You know? Being a bridge over the gaps that are in place within my community. It's not even the name Yoga, it's the stigma around it. So, just kind of breaking and pushing through that. And putting it into a place where it can be accessed by my community. (Aroha)*

Aroha teaches a version of Yoga that is inspired by ancient Egyptian mythology. In her description of her training she mentioned the importance her teacher placed on a cultural exchange of knowledge. When she teaches this style of Yoga in her Māori community, she speaks in both Te Reo Māori and English. She regularly compares the teachings she is presenting to the cultural knowledge that Māori practitioners may already be embodying. Below, I offer a quote from Aroha where she describes the knowledge that her community may already be embodying when they arrive to a Yoga class:

*Well, for starters, that kind of meditative side of it is something we already know – I notice it. Like, last year, every second week, I would do half an hour Yoga and meditation with pregnant Māori women. It was part of an initiative that the health board was doing. It's an immersion for pregnant women to learn about the whole pregnancy thing over two days and with a traditional Māori approach. So I would come in and teach them. And when it came to the meditation and Yoga part I would ask, "So, has anyone done Yoga before?" And you might get one hand, and there's usually 20 to 30 women. And then, "Has anyone ever done meditation?" And I don't think I ever got one hand come up out of probably 10 to 15 sessions. So, then I would briefly sort of explain what it (meditation) was. And then I'd say,*

*well you actually already do it, you just don't realise. Because what I started to notice is that Māori people just go straight into it and deep into it – you know? I mean, we do all sorts of different practices like karakia which is like prayer, and we do that a lot. And I do kapa haka, and for me, that is a form of meditation. To me, it's like a form of Yoga. (Aroha)*

Aroha offers her classes in a variety of settings that include popular gyms and urban Yoga studios. Today, she places priority on teaching in community centres or in culturally specific spaces where her community members feel welcome. She also offers her teachings at little to no cost. Aroha is disrupting assumptions around Yoga as an appropriated, Western, consumer-driven phenomenon (Cowans, 2016; Miller, 2016; Webb et al., 2017), to build a space where she can honour her culture while helping her community to feel included in practices that she has personally found beneficial. She is blending various knowledges that have equal importance in her teachings and acknowledging the ways that multiple worlds can build positive futures together. Aroha's example is not representative of all of the participants, but including her experiences in this discussion highlights an interesting potential for future research on the ways that multiple cultural knowledges are building new practices in contemporary forms of Yoga.

The women of this study are all facing the tensions of appropriation differently. While some may be approaching them subtly through the consumptive practices or language choices, others (like Aroha) are dedicating their lives to breaking down barriers through large community initiatives. Importantly, the size of the women's actions do not determine their worth. As demonstrated by the range of ways that the women of this study are embodying Yoga, there is no one way to take affirmative ethical action in a Yoga lifestyle. Therefore, ideas around yogis always being environmentalists, vegetarians or minimalists may be limiting to the range of ways that contemporary Yoga practitioners are embodying everyday ethical practices.

To be a contemporary Yoga practitioner one does not necessarily need to change eating habits nor be involved in any specific form of activism. The unifying feature of all of the women's Yoga lifestyles is a continual and considered effort to make ethical choices amongst their daily lives as often as possible. As Braidotti (2019) writes:

Being worthy of the present is not intended in a passive and acquiescent manner, but rather in an active mode, as a way of coming to terms with the present, in order to intervene in it and transform it. Being of the here and now is a prerequisite to account for the conditions of our existence, of our limitations, of our constraint. (pp. 464-465)

Below, I offer specific descriptions of the women's attempts at embodying ethics throughout their everyday lives. These lived experiences are examples of the ways that these women are facing their present contexts and making decisions as critical responses to daily challenges.

### **Embodying ethics in everyday life**

The discussion of ethics and Yoga practices, as built through this chapter, has been informed by Braidotti's (2019) writing on affirmative ethics in a generative life that is always becoming. I consider this as I describe the women's experiences of generating an embodied understanding of ethics in their daily lives. Their gradual absorption of ethical practices over years of engagement continues to "grow and mold" (as previously described by T.) alongside their accumulated understandings of both themselves, their surroundings, and the many influences that are contributing to their existence.

The women's journeys alongside Yoga throughout their daily lives demonstrates continual progressions of subtle, cumulative changes over time. While the women are shifting the ways that they interact in their worlds, these decisions are not the result of a sudden transformation. Rather, they are arising out of a generative becoming that is expanding alongside an increasing awareness of the importance of ethics and a desire to align with their embodied values. As mentioned in Chapter Four, the choices the women are making in their Yoga lifestyles are informed by the value of authenticity (interpreted as finding integrity). Many of the women mentioned conscientious shifts in their lifestyle choices as they became more involved in Yoga. However, they were unable to ascertain whether these choices could be attributed to an increasing interest in living an ethically-based Yoga lifestyle, or whether these changes were merely indicative of shifting life circumstances and/or a natural result of aging and prioritising different values as their understandings of self and integrity evolved. Regardless, many of the

women mention shifts in their lives alongside their continued dedication to Yoga. Below T. reflects on her growing interest in environmental activism:

*When you start gaining a lot of interest in Yoga, you learn about the lifestyle and learn about the parts that aren't the physical. But really, my Yoga is coming into my life through my breathing and my thoughts. And what I notice is that Yoga has allowed me, through being aware of myself, to become more aware of the world around me. I mean, I have always had an interest in the environment, but lately I have really delved into questioning where everything is going. And it hasn't been a conscious thing, like – because of Yoga, this has happened. It has kind of just grown, as a natural thing, alongside my growing Yoga practice. (T.)*

Like Braidotti's (2019) description of the multiple aspects of a given moment arising and "always about to burst into life" (p. 468), the women mention innumerable influences that are contributing to their present moment and consequentially, take these into consideration. The women regularly acknowledge the process of embodying the values of Yoga as influential in promoting subtle shifts in the choices they are making throughout their daily lives. The women maintain their integrity and are not 'transforming' into vastly different beings. Rather, through their continued embodiment of Yoga, they are increasingly moving from an affirmative ethical space. Below, Robin reflects on how her life has changed over the course of ten years engaging with Yoga:

*It's hard to say if it is the Yoga. Because, from when I started Yoga, so much has changed. I mean, it's been over ten years and I'm living in a different country, and I have a partner, and all this other stuff has changed. So, it's easy to say things like I have really good relationships with my partner, and with my friends, and I feel really supported on a lot of levels. So, I can say that I feel more ease in my mind, but that could be because of external factors like the support I am receiving. I mean, I would like to think that I'm less reactionary now, but I don't know. I'd like to think that I am better able to handle things, but I'm still actually a spaz, despite my meditation practice. I think it's just my personality. (Robin)*

There are many points of interest in Robin's quote. Primarily, I wish to highlight how Robin, like many of the women in this study, is critically reflecting upon her entire lived experience and is not quickly assuming that everything can be attributed to the practice of Yoga. Through our interactions, Robin described the many ways that the practices of Yoga have influenced her life and continue to enhance her lived experiences. Most importantly, and similar to many of the women in this study, she takes time to reflect and consider the ways that her life is always changing and acknowledges how Yoga is supporting this continual evolution.

Informed by guidelines from various yogic texts and their embodied experiences throughout daily life, the women are consistently learning. However, unlike Yoga texts that prioritise individual attainment of enlightenment (Desikachar, 1995; Feuerstein & Wilber, 1998), the women of this study are not reaching towards maintaining states of bliss. Rather, the women of this ethnographic work are more concerned with how their continued attempts at living ethically-informed lives can contribute towards affirmative futures.

### **Contemporary enlightenment: From awareness to everyday ethics**

In many of the conversations with the women we discussed the purpose of Yoga in contemporary society. We reflected on the reasons behind our continued dedication to Yoga as practices that encourage an increasing awareness. Talking with the women about their motivations, I received a range of answers, and none of them involved individual enlightenment. While the women admitted that personal growth was beneficial, this was only a tool that could be used to inform their choices throughout their daily lives. For the women of this study, service, action, participation and even activism were mentioned as the inspiration behind their continued commitment to living Yoga lifestyles. In the quote below from Breeze, she describes the importance of participation and compares this with experiences and teachings on bliss:

*Yoga can bring you into a blissful state. It's pure bliss. And then, you have to try not to get attached to that bliss. Because that's the important thing...the old philosophy says don't dwell on the bliss. Because you are not supposed to dwell. Practice is teaching you to try to remain neutral.*



*Yoga helps you to experience some blissful states, but then, don't make that all there is. Because you need to return into the real world. There is more to yoga than bliss, you need to participate. (Breeze)*

In many Yoga texts, the practices of Yoga all describe a continual progression that will bring the practitioner towards experiencing (or even momentarily glimpsing) an enlightened state (Desikachar, 1995; Feuerstein & Wilber, 1998; Satchidananda, 1978). This state is often described as an uninterrupted bliss that occurs when the practitioner experiences complete absorption (Taneja, 2014). Attaining “union with divine consciousness” (Devi, 2010, p.163), uninterrupted bliss, and heightened states have previously been prioritised in Yoga discourse as the ultimate aim of a practitioner. This is reflected in popular publications through the promotion of phrases like ‘follow your bliss’ (Cowans, 2016).

Individualised notions of reaching states of enlightenment could be arising due to goals that are valued by neoliberal societies (Godrej, 2017; Leledaki, 2014; Markula, 2014). Both achievement and personal mastery are characteristics previously discussed in relation to socio-cultural critiques of neoliberal feminisms (Gill & Orgad, 2018; McRobbie, 2015; Rottenberg, 2018). Although these influences are present in the women’s lives, after years navigating these tensions (as described throughout this thesis), they are arriving at different motivations behind their practices.

Moving alongside long-term women Yoga practitioners, I recognise that they view the purpose of practice differently. The women of this study are not concerned with attainment of an ultimate self or state. Rather, they are considering how the teachings of Yoga might be able to assist them in being increasingly conscientious citizens amongst their daily lives. Below, is a quote from a conversation with Uma after I asked her the question, what is Yoga?:

*The first thing that automatically comes to mind is from the Yoga sutras. ‘Yoga is the restraint of the modifications of the mindstuff.’ But, I guess more on a day to day level, it’s a toolbox full of things you can use to get through your life, to enhance your life, to be of service to people. It’s a set of practices and tools you can use for whatever direction you want to*

*travel. (Uma)*

Uma's reference to a 'toolbox' connects back to the discussion in Chapter Four where I used the women's examples to demonstrate their use of Yoga teachings as 'tools' to build personally meaningful lifestyles. In Uma's quote, she mentions tools and practices. Her inclusion of both, points to the necessity of embedding the ethical teachings (tools) as lifestyle decisions (practices) throughout daily life. Further, her mention of using Yoga to help direct life could indicate her awareness of the influence of considered actions towards generative becomings.

Below, Aurora describes the futility of awareness without action. I appreciate this quote as it immediately brings to mind some of the 'conscious' communities that I have lived amongst whilst immersing myself in Yoga. I wonder if it is possible to be aware and apathetic at the same time? Below, Aurora describes her frustrations surrounding individuals claiming awareness without adjusting their behaviours and expresses her thoughts around the importance of action:

*As Yoga practitioners today, we seem to be picking up this awareness but we need to use this awareness. We can't just sit there saying, 'oh I'm aware that I am doing all of this harmful stuff,' but then doing nothing about it. I mean, we've got all this awareness, and the point is, we have to use it. We have to use it to do something. Because otherwise, we are going to sit there and go, 'well I am so aware of this,' but then actually do nothing. And then just watch everything completely fold all around us. So the point that I'm coming to is action, when we are aware of something, we have to do something about it. (Aurora)*

As indicated by the majority of the women throughout the entirety of this process, the value they find in continually committing to living Yoga lifestyles, arises through the ways that their dedicated practices are shifting the choices they are making in their lives. Committing to living ethically, continually reflecting and making attempts at improving, for these women, has less to do with personal achievement and more to do with contribution.

### ***Informed by joy and despair***

As mentioned earlier, there is a dominant discursive formation around the blissful pathway that can lead practitioners towards enlightenment (Cowans, 2016). While there are benefits to understanding the causes of joy and understanding which experiences bring enjoyment in life, there are also benefits to understanding the causes of despair as instances that can inform ethical acts. Atkinson (2017), suggests that both suffering and pleasure can inform a broad understanding of the varied lived experiences for Yoga practitioners. In a discussion on spiritual activism, Sheridan (2012) recommends an “openness to suffering” (p. 193) as a principle suggesting that acknowledging the needs of those struggling because of social injustice can bring more empathy.

Braidotti (2019) suggests that through increasing awareness around the critical issues of our time, there lies potential to awaken from slumber and bring problems into the light. She suggests that through their illumination, issues of our time can be reworked and transformed through affirmative ethical actions. Instead of ignoring problems, Braidotti (2019) encourages “transforming the debris and the ruins into workable possible systems, despair into praxis” (p. 470). Below T. reflects on the importance of awakening to the ‘despair’ of contemporary times:

*When you see the bad in the world, or the despair in the world, it opens you up to think about what you can do to help the situation. So that is the silver lining, increasing our knowledge. It's such a cliché, but knowledge is power. When you are aware, when you know of these things and then you can help. And in a way it's good that this stuff is in the news and all that. Because it opens our eyes to the pain, and then we can do something about it. (T.)*

Although awakening to the despair in the world can be overwhelming for empathetic individuals, particularly those exposed to sensitive topics over time (Sheridan, 2012; Toombs et al., 2017), the women of this study are arriving at ways to manage this stress. Maha Shakti reflects on this below as she considers the multiple injustices she faced while living in Cambodia for 18 years. She suggests that, where she used to become overwhelmed thinking about taking on all aspects of the negative world that was surrounding her, she now focuses on what is possible with the resources she can access:

*More Yoga in the world is helping people to become more aware. I think we've got hope. People are becoming more aware, and that is so important in this kind of world we are living in. So, I am just helping in any way that I can and reminding myself that I'm on this constant journey. I just keep going and who knows where it's going to lead, that's faith you know? But also, I'm not putting too much pressure on myself or thinking too much about my service and my impact. I think that if you over think things then you can get a bit worried. You can get like, 'what the f\*\*\* is going on in the world today' or like 'where am I among all this.' So, I'm just letting go and doing what I can. (Maha Shakti)*

Interestingly, both quotes in this section from T. and Maha Shakti finish with statements around doing what is possible. Maha Shakti isn't shying away from taking action, but she is acknowledging her place amongst the broader generative system she is moving within. Many of the women in this study are turning their understandings of their place in the world into opportunities for ethical acts. Through conscientious participation, the women of this study are embodying everyday ethics in various ways. There is no one example of living ethically that is more impactful than any other. All of the women are doing what they can with what they have and are conscientiously contributing to the best of their ability.

### ***Considered choices***

Braidotti (2019) mentions the importance of acknowledging the challenges that are directly influencing posthuman knowing subjects. By considering surroundings and the many factors influencing a given situation, she suggests taking affirmative ethical actions in ways that are appropriate and respectful of the myriad of dynamics present. Increasing awareness and thoughtfully considering the entire situation helped many of the women in this study to develop ethical practices that could support their unique roles in varied contexts.

The women's actions were at the same time vocal and subtle, but all ethical choices reflected an awareness of both the place they were occupying and the level of action that would be appropriate in any given situation. Below, Aroha reflects on her experience being involved in a large, non-violent resistance protest overseas. Her

example offers insight into her process of thoughtfully considering actions she could take that would best attend to the situation. Through listening, adjusting her posture and considering her movements, she offers multi-layered possibilities for ethical practices:

*While I was there I knew I had a purpose. I mean, I wasn't funded by my people to go all the way over there and just take selfies. I knew I needed to do some bloody work. And so it kind of led me on this pathway to understanding how I could be the best use in that situation. Just using my breath, not speaking, but listening and tuning in. This helped me work out how to carry myself around the place posturally. I knew that I was there representing my people, and so I knew I had to carry myself a certain way. With strength. A strong, straight backbone. But at the same time, moving with humility, not noisy or crazy. So, keeping my tongue against the roof of my mouth and breathing through my nose. All of that ensured that I stayed calm, stayed present. I wasn't talking all the time when I actually just needed to listen. (Aroha)*

Aroha's example highlights the importance of thoughtful contribution. While many individuals may attribute action and everyday affirmative ethics with grand gestures and large acts of resistance against structural injustices, the women of this study offer multi-faceted understandings around what is possible through considered attempts at facing each day and doing what is possible. Below, Michael reflects on the importance of the everyday acts:

*Yoga is about hearing and understanding my own voice. And then beyond that, it is that sense of feeling that we are all connected. It is understanding that all the little things that you do and how you are in the world does have an impact. That concept of where we are in the universe, and connecting into a knowing that we are all connected. But not just to other people, also animals and mother nature, the earth and everything around us, we are all interconnected. I am saying this thinking about my garden. Sometimes my Yoga and connection comes from sticking my hands in the dirt, from growing food and having my neighbours over for tea. (Michael)*

Michael's example above describes gardening and providing nourishment. Her description of her actions in the above quote only highlight a small portion of the everyday affirmative ethical acts she regularly engages with throughout her daily life. Moving alongside Michael, I have witnessed her efforts towards making considered, ethically informed actions throughout her daily life in the hopes that she might inspire others. Her decisions to ride a bicycle, eat from her garden and/or consume minimally might seem too subtle to impact change. However, after moving alongside her for a long period of time, I understand that her decisions are political, conscientious acts that are influencing her community.

Through small, daily, embodied acts encouraging connection and kindness, these contemporary practitioners are contributing to what Pottinger (2017) defines as "quiet activism" (p. 215). This style of action offers an alternative to traditionally vocal, demonstrative acts of defiance. While there is a place for vocal, large-scale resistance, these considered, continual, small acts of kindness also have strength when compounded over time amongst a growing critical mass (Pottinger, 2017). Below, Peanut reflects on finding ways to be helpful in her community:

*We're all really on that same path aren't we? We are all trying to make ourselves more valuable and going in a direction that is not hurting others, not impeding on anybody else. I suppose in a silly little petty way, I see that I can be more valuable in that I can put the flowers in the vase. Because at this stage that's my value. And at my age, I'm not terribly useful in other ways so it's good if I'm of some use. (Peanut)*

Peanut, as a practitioner in her 90s, is an invaluable member of her Yoga community in numerous ways. In the above discussion, she is talking about her contribution of floral bouquets that she brings to her Yoga studio and sources from her garden. Beyond this beautiful contribution, she regularly attends classes throughout the week. Her attendance in class, contribution of flowers, and approach to life, all provide the individuals that are around her with endless inspiration. In just being, she is demonstrating an example of what is possible within an aging body.

By existing in the world, Peanut is contributing in ways that she is unable to fathom. Through Peanut's example, I am reminded that contemporary Yoga practitioners are indeed posthuman knowing subjects. These women are aware of their connection with their surroundings and consider the variety of past and present formations that are contributing to their generative moments. They are allowing themselves to arise as entities driven by ethically-informed and affirmative choices and they understand their place amongst the broader system of existence. Returning to the concept of a posthuman and finding resonance in Braidotti's (2018) writing on posthumanism. Below, I provide a quote from Braidotti (2018) on the self-organising properties of matter:

All matter or substance being one and immanent to itself, it is intelligent and self-organizing in both human and non-human organisms (Lloyd, 1994, 1996; Protevi, 2013). Vital matter is driven by the ontological desire for the expression of its innermost freedom (conatus). This understanding of matter animates the composition of posthuman subjects of knowledge – embedded, embodied and yet flowing in a web of relations with human and non-human others. (Braidotti, 2018, p. 4)

Braidotti's (2018) description of posthuman subjects of knowledge as self-organising entities living in relation with matter and motivated by personal expressions of freedom connects to discussions offered in all three of my findings chapters. In Chapter Four, I described women's pathways to authenticity. Their drive to continually reconsider their choices alongside an evolving sense of self could be compared to a desire for freedom. My representation of entangled Yoga bodies in Chapter Five illustrates the agency of matter, this relates to Braidotti's (2018) description of intelligent, self-organising human and non-human organisms. Finally, in this chapter, I extended to consider how the embodied Yoga practitioners of this study are bringing all of this to life through the choices they are making within their daily lives.

I titled this final section 'considered choices' to indicate that the women of this study are taking the time to reflect on their ethics, the situations they are faced with, and the most appropriate action in any given situation. The insights of the women, as provided throughout this chapter, illustrate daily practices that are informed by thoughtful reflection. Braidotti (2019) suggests that, in order for our world to move in a direction

that is thoughtfully derived, posthuman knowing subjects will require both space and time to act in considered ways that uniquely address the problems of our time. She suggests cultivating a “space of stillness” (Braidotti, 2019, p. 479) whereby critical thinkers might be given the opportunity to slow down and allow for processed thought to guide affirmative actions.

Braidotti’s (2019) writing on the necessary element of space for reflection is mirrored in the women practitioners’ commitment to practices that increase awareness. When applied with consideration, the tools the women are embodying are allowing them the opportunity to slow down and reflect on their lived experiences, consider the challenges they are presently faced with and contemplate how their daily lives can influence an affirmative becoming. They may not always get it right, but in trying, failing, and succeeding the women are continually attempting, reflecting and learning how to move ethically and affirmatively throughout their lives.

Living in a space that is simultaneously ceasing to be and becoming, taking a step backwards from this moment of decisive action, it may be possible for the posthuman to exist in what Braidotti (2019) terms a space of non-belonging. This “little kind of non-human zone would allow us to transform the weight of the negative into a collective affirmation of the possibilities of alternatives” (Braidotti, 2019, p. 479). Taking time to reflect before action in this space, where time has yet to be decided and the individual is hovering between past, present and future, it may be possible to contemplate alternatives and choose a direction for Yoga that moves toward affirmation and possibility.

Gaining insights from the women of this study, I recognise that many of them are pausing, considering and directing their actions and this is filling them with hope. Taking initiative and behaving in ways that they consider to be influencing the continual becoming of the world, they are not driven by neoliberal aims of self-governance towards individual gain (Gill & Scharff, 2011; McRobbie, 2015; Newman, 2017; Rottenberg, 2018). Rather, they are inspired to choose differently in the hope that their actions can support a movement where similar minded individuals that are ethically-informed by practices of kindness, simplicity and acceptance are contributing towards affirmative futures.



## **Researcher reflections: Being is enough**

Choosing to complete a PhD on Yoga, and teaching upwards of fifteen Yoga classes in a week has kept me quite busy. Writing in an office tucked away in the fourth floor of a university building, I needed to remind myself to get into nature, talk to people and occasionally eat food. The juxtaposition of writing on oneness whilst confining myself to isolation, or recommending taking action in daily life while spending endless hours staring at my computer screen brought me to question the relevance of this work. If the women of this study are entangled, self-organising, embedded entities influencing their worlds, I too must be part of this. This awareness brought me to consider the ways that I am contributing towards an affirmative becoming.

The process of a PhD can be a lonely endeavour that requires deep questioning and the methodology for this particular study demanded that I dive into questions of an existential nature. While it has been a joy to study a topic that is of personal interest, it has also caused moments of high stress. In these moments, I questioned my abilities, doubted the research, wanted to give up and attempted to force myself to fit into what I thought might be representative of a ‘good’ yogi in the eyes of the Yoga community. Initially, the pressures I was placing upon myself around trying to make a ‘valuable contribution’ were bringing me discomfort.

Moving with the women of this study and learning through their example, I have been given the opportunity to soften my approach to Yoga, and this (in turn) has influenced my research. In letting go of forcing myself to fit into a stereotypical role of someone with Yoga knowledge, I found freedom. In allowing myself to stop practicing an extremely disciplined style of Yoga that was hurting my knees, I found freedom. Everytime I allowed myself to let go of ways that I was forcing myself to fit, I found freedom. As mentioned above, Braidotti (2018) suggests that “vital matter is driven by the ontological desire for the expression of its innermost freedom” (p. 4). In releasing the ways that I was trying to impose ‘good’ Yoga practices whilst trying to be an ‘example’ in my community I began to realise that in just being myself and completing this research, I am contributing.

Moving alongside the women I have found ease learning that there are innumerable ways to live with Yoga and am finally beginning to accept my full expression of this

(inclusive of the occasional wine and/or loud rock concert). In research, I accept that I am a posthuman knowing subject that is continually becoming. As such, I am finally allowing myself to also be an imperfect, evolving entity. I appreciate that all of the women in this study are remarkably unique and I value them for this multiplicity. It has only been through this work that I have finally been able to accept my difference and my contribution. I am grateful to arrive in this moment. It took many years of generative becoming and I am hopeful there will be many more.

## **Summary**

The women of this study are consistently embodying practices of Yoga throughout their daily lives. They have dedicated years to internally questioning and experimenting with various adaptations and applications of the teachings of Yoga. They are working continually to live ethically, and consider their affirmative ethical lifestyles to be providing them a method through which they can contribute amongst their daily lives. Informed by the ethics of Yoga, these women practitioners are finding personal meanings for contemporary Yoga lifestyles.

As posthuman knowing subjects, the women of this study are motivated to reframe their ethical practices and apply teachings to daily life in attempts at contributing towards futures that are hopeful. Through the women's continual efforts at living in line with everyday affirmative ethics, they are finding a purpose for their Yoga practices. They are optimistic that their continued ethical choices are contributing to a generative becoming that is affirmative. Critically examining and responding to the challenges they are faced with throughout their immediate daily lives, they have faith that their actions are building towards a critical mass of practitioners who similarly believe in a becoming that is kind and accepting.

Braidotti (2018, 2019) suggests that through adopting affirmative ethics in daily life, posthuman knowing subjects are given opportunity to transform challenges into potential solutions through creative and critical engagement. She expresses hope when thinking about the future and encourages scholars to collaborate and creatively build theories towards affirmative becomings. While it might be easy to remain in the comfort of the known, Braidotti (2013) sees how innovative theories and concepts can illuminate

contemporary tensions. “Instead of falling back on the sedimented habits of thought that the humanist past has institutionalized, the posthuman predicament encourages us to undertake a leap forward into the complexities and paradoxes of our times” (Braidotti, 2013, p. 54).

The contemporary women practitioners of this study are consistently and conscientiously considering their daily lives as part of the broader becoming of existence. Like Braidotti (2019), the women of this study are shifting their motivations to sustain contemporary Yoga lifestyles that address contemporary challenges. They are moving away from individualised notions of enlightened selves as the ultimate goal of Yoga and are emphasising the importance of everyday ethical practices that can generatively build affirmative futures.

## Chapter Seven: Conclusion

### Generative becomings in Yoga: Reimagining lifestyles, embodiment and ethics

✱

*On this particular Monday, I am sitting in my office,  
deadline looming and lingering pen over paper.*

*I am hesitating to commit experiences to words, unsure how to contain everything that I  
have simultaneously gained and lost through this process of inquiry. I write my opening  
sentence five times and each time the wording is slightly off.*

✱

*Frustrated, I push myself away from my desk and the rolling office chair glides across  
the carpet. I assume my 'thinking āsana' (this consists of lying on my back with my legs  
up the wall). What do I want to say? How can I summarise the knowledge gained  
through these women? It all seems a bit much this morning...*

*Realising that no answers are coming, I decide to take a quick stroll to the café  
(maybe insufficient caffeination is to blame for my indecisiveness).*

✱

*I take a slight detour and enjoy a loop around the small lake on campus.  
The fresh air and long strides allow my lungs and limbs the opportunity to expand. The  
purple magnolias are blooming and the calm waters of the lake are glistening in the sun.*

✱

*As I approach the University café I see one of the Yoga practitioners I have been  
working with. I take time to observe her movements...  
She is carefully adjusting her position in the line to accommodate for others and smiling  
politely to those that are around her. Just witnessing her subtle, considered movements  
makes me smile. The whole world is in motion...  
music...bodies...coffees...laughter...and she is immersed amongst it...  
ebbing and flowing with the movements that surround her.*

✱

*As I approach her, she intuitively turns. Her smile grows as our eyes meet.  
We share a huge hug and without hesitation we dive straight into a deep chat.  
She recounts a situation she is facing at home and I share about my struggles with*

*motivation. We trust each other enough to know that open sharing is both welcomed and appreciated. Our conversation style is mutually affirmative and caring. I am excited to chat with her about an upcoming training she has registered for and she engages me while I mention entanglement...again...*

✱

*Collecting our warm drinks we share another long embrace then go on our way.*

*As I walk back to my office I am filled with gratitude.*

*My woes around writing have softened.*

*This interaction reminded me how truly lucky I am to have been given the opportunity to learn from women Yoga practitioners. They trusted me with the intimate details of their personal lives and together we shared many touching moments.*

*Back at the office, I open my computer.*

*I take another sip of espresso then start to write.*

*I realise it is impossible to capture these immense moments on the page...*

*but it is worthwhile to try.*

✱

Throughout this conclusion I reflect on the unique contributions of this research. I present the journey towards new understandings that this thesis has facilitated, and the process of researching contemporary Yoga lifestyles through an entangled ethnographic approach. In the pages that follow, I overview my methodological process, provide summaries of key findings, reflect on processes and offer recommendations for future research. As this ethnography draws to its end, I understand that this study has resulted in a wide range of findings on contemporary women's Yoga lifestyles. This research contributes new knowledge through an embodied and entangled ethnography with women committed to physical cultural lifestyles. Further, the process of working closely with these dedicated women inside this research has facilitated new understandings of Yoga, lifestyles, embodiment and the ethical practices of contemporary practitioners.

This research began with the question, 'what is a contemporary Yoga lifestyle?' At the end of an intensive process, moving with women for 14 months through both 'mundane' and 'transcendent' moments in contemporary Yoga lifestyles, I recognise that this research has produced a breadth of knowledge that extends beyond my anticipated findings. In Chapter One, I described being interested in developing a methodological process that could allow me to broaden understandings of women's lived experiences in

Yoga. This process enabled more depth than I had originally hoped for and this richness can, in part, be attributed to the methodological structure of this research.

Questions asked at the beginning of this process led me to design an entangled ethnographic study that enabled me to deeply connect and inquire into women's lives. Through continued efforts to build a research space prioritising both feminist and yogic ethics, the women and I shared our experiences in safe environments. Throughout this ethnography, we confided in each other about the joys and struggles that arise through the journey of life and found comfort in understanding that our experiences in Yoga shared many similarities. Our differences provided me the opportunity to expand understandings and contemplate how Yoga lifestyles can be both similar and varied through shared values lived in multiple ways. In this conclusion, I describe how a unique entangled approach, combining principles of both Yoga and feminisms, resulted in nuanced and new understandings.

Braidotti (2019) suggests that in order to find creative solutions to current conditions, researchers must face what is uncomfortable. The methodology and process I prioritised in this project demanded that I maintain a level of vulnerability that could foster trusting relationships. This research, the relationships developed, and the insights gained all contribute to a growing body of knowledge. The following pages present the ways that this thesis is expanding understandings of women's contemporary Yoga lifestyles, their experiences in Yoga bodies, feminist ethnographic research in physical cultures and the presence of ethics in daily life. I provide a framework for an entangled feminist ethnography on Yoga and suggest how reflexivity can be multi-faceted. Offering final remarks and reflections, I finish this conclusion with a discussion that centres on hope.

## **Innovation in methodology: An entangled ethnography**

In Chapter One I posed the research question, “what possibilities are contained within feminist ethnographic approaches for facilitating a deeper understanding of women's lived experiences in Yoga lifestyles?” In this concluding chapter, I suggest how this work has expanded understandings around the ways that feminist principles can support an ethnography on Yoga. Importantly, in the entangled ethnography I designed for this research, feminist theories and practices were always considered in the ways that they

could interact with the women's embodied experiences of Yoga practices.

One of the most important contributions of this work is the construction of an entangled ethnography built upon feminist and yogic principles specifically for working with women Yoga practitioners. For this research, I knew that I wanted to work intimately with committed women Yoga practitioners. My initial aim was to understand the nuances that were present throughout their daily lives. In designing this project, I became curious about the ways that the embodied philosophies of Yoga practitioners could be present in my methodological design and was drawn to feminist ethnographic methods. Working between both Yoga philosophy and feminist principles, I navigated a dialogue in the space between. The design of this research and my decisions throughout this ethnography were informed by a feminist-yogic entanglement. Continual and careful considerations of my methodological design and process resulted in close relationships with the women and a deep level of trust.

This entanglement of embodied experiences and academic theory has implications for future research in physical cultures. While this entangled ethnography is inspired by the values of Yoga, it is interesting to consider how an ethnography in other movement cultures could be catered to the values that are embodied by participants. As I described in this thesis, Yoga is existing in contemporary times as a practice with a unique history and a complex present that are cumulatively contributing to the ways that practitioners understand and embody teachings. Each physical culture has a past and present that are mutually influencing the values being prioritised by community members. The values being embodied by individuals participating in physical cultures are multi-faceted (and at times, not immediately apparent). Nevertheless, they are worthy of consideration when designing an ethnography. For example, what values do boxers, dancers, climbers and/or snowboarders embody and how might these qualities inform research design? The unique ways that I have designed this particular entangled research may not be applicable (or even relevant) in a different physical culture. However, this consideration of dialoguing between embodied values and academic theory to inform research design presents an interesting consideration when approaching ethnographic inquiry in physical cultures.

As mentioned in the methodology chapter, building an entangled ethnographic space whereby the two knowledges of Yoga and feminisms find resonance was a process of discovery that evolved over the course of this study. At the onset of the research, I designed models of potential entanglements based on Yoga texts, feminist literature and my embodied experiences as a long-term Yoga practitioner and teacher. The original slide in Chapter Three illustrates these connections (refer to Figure 1). As mentioned in the methodology chapter (and as I illustrate here), the entanglements that were most relevant over the course of this project changed. As my understandings of feminist theory expanded alongside the insights I was gaining through the women's embodied experiences, the entanglements I prioritised shifted. Evolving entanglements between Yoga philosophies (white lettering) and feminist principles (green lettering) are shown in a revised image below:

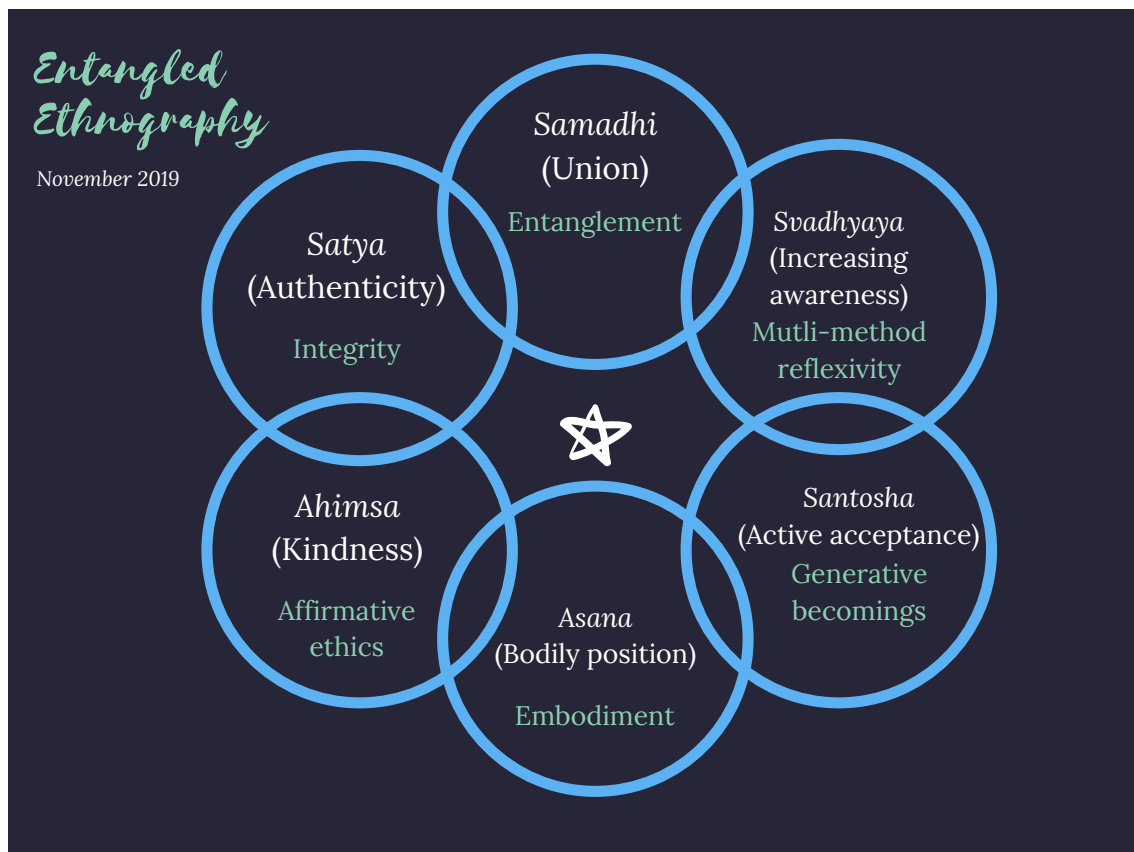


Figure 4: Evolving entanglements.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Transliterations were not possible on this image (refer to Appendix 1 for *Sanskrit* pronunciations and transliterations).



After moving with the women for over a year, I allowed my initial understandings of entanglements to broaden and took inspiration from the women's insights. At the end of this project, I recognise that many aspects of my original model became less relevant while others (shown above) revealed themselves as increasingly significant inside this research. The entanglements in Figure 4 reflect a considered application of Yoga philosophy and feminist theory through multiple methods and time points inside a 14-month ethnography and respond to the findings that accumulated over time. Allowing entanglements to evolve enabled this research to accommodate and grow in ways that I could not have anticipated.

The entanglements in the image above (Figure 4) are the ones that were most relevant in this particular study. My decisions to focus on particular entanglements were informed by the women practitioners, Yoga texts, feminist literature and my reflexive practices throughout the research process. The particular combinations suggested above are not presented as rigid formations that 'should' be present in all such entangled ethnographies. Rather, they reflect a process that is in progress. Potentially, future projects will benefit from different entanglements. This research design offers an important contribution and a consideration for future ethnographic research. It presents a unique ethnographic process that is inspired by two different bodies of knowledge, thus allowing the mutually beneficial teachings of both feminisms and Yoga to equally influence pathways towards greater understandings.

### ***The contributions of an entangled ethnography***

There are many valuable outcomes that arise out of the entangled ethnographic approach I designed for this research. Firstly, in locating spaces where multiple bodies of knowledge and ways of knowing could entangle, this research disrupts dominant narratives and contributes to a growing body of literature that is questioning the prioritisation of solely Western theory in academic spaces (Barret, 2015; Bost, 2016; Kaufmann, 2017). Through this methodology I offer insight into ways that multiple knowledges can mutually enrich a research space. While I have focused on Yoga and feminist entanglements, as mentioned above, other bodies of literature and practices in women's lifestyles and physical cultures might undertake a process of locating spaces between multiple bodies and ways of knowing.

A further value of this methodological structure is found in the depth of empirical material that I was able to gather through this process. This is a result of entangling Western theory with Yoga philosophies that the women were already embodying. Adapting the design of the work to continually accommodate the women's needs, this process responded to their values and ethics. Thinking of ways to adjust both the research setting and my delivery of methods to reflect the values of participants has implications when researchers are immersing themselves within movement cultures. It prompts questions around how participants are thinking and relating such that research projects can reflect these sensibilities in research design.

The entangled methodological structure I created specifically for working with women Yoga practitioners to gain deep understandings about lifestyles is also a unique and valuable contribution to the body of literature on methods for researching Yoga. Beyond the consideration of multiple knowledges and values in a research space, the timeline and use of varied methods further enabled close connections with the women. Working with the practitioners very closely over an ethnography with multiple methods and many touch points through the process, allowed these relationships to build over time. This entangled ethnography offers a unique process for gaining trust and depth in meaningful relationships with participants in a research setting. By considering values and attending to care over a long period of time, strong bonds may be built that allow for more nuanced understandings of lived experiences.

This thesis provides insights for future researchers who might be interested in researching women's lived experiences in movement cultures. Moving with the women in a feminist ethnography, writing journals, deeply discussing the nature of existence, sharing rich details about Yoga and life in a group setting, all whilst embodying the practices of Yoga as philosophical and ethical teachings promoting connection, allowed this project to develop as it has. Dialoguing between embodied experiences and philosophy amongst a continually evolving research design facilitated an inquiry that was creative, critical and perpetually becoming. The image of entangled concepts that found relevance in this research reveals a number elements (refer to Figure 4). All of the entanglements illustrated in Figure 4 proved extremely influential in this research. However, due to word limitations, I can only accommodate an extended description of one entanglement in this conclusion. In-depth descriptions for all of the entanglements

shown on Figure 4 are contained in Appendix 14.

### ***The influence of union and entanglement in a feminist-yogic ethnography***

Madison (2020) defines four principles that comprise what she terms an “ethics of ethnographic mindfulness” (p. 115). Her list of ethical mindfulness practices include: meditation and stillness, presence and deep attention, non-judgement and self-awareness, letting go and connection (pp. 115-116). While I recognise some similarities in her decisions when thinking through my own work in this feminist ethnography on Yoga, the entanglements I illustrate in Figure 4 present the opportunity to add more nuance to recommendations in a research setting. Combining the principles of feminist ethnography with the ethical and philosophical practices of Yoga as informed by women’s embodied knowledge, extends upon Madison’s (2020) work. The entanglements I offer are informed by the women immersed in the research, connect multiple knowledges and are in a continual state of becoming. As mentioned above, the length of this thesis is constrained by certain limitations and therefore, below, I describe the overarching entanglement that influenced all aspects of this ethnography.

Moving with women practitioners in this ethnography, I was continually presented with descriptions of an interconnected existence that included both human and non-human forms. In dedicating themselves to Yoga lifestyles, the women were embodying experiences of union and through our interactions, they were attempting to articulate these moments. Finding the words to describe intimate, felt and transcendent experiences proved challenging. After searching widely through various bodies of literature in attempts at locating similar themes of interconnectivity, I found benefit in dialoguing with feminist new materialisms. The writing of Karen Barad (2007) and Rosi Braidotti (2013), in particular, offered me access to a language that supported me in articulating these profound moments. Below, I have included an image with quotes from Devi (2010) on yogic union and Barad (2003) on entanglement. These quotes highlight that, while there are similarities in these concepts, they are also slightly different:

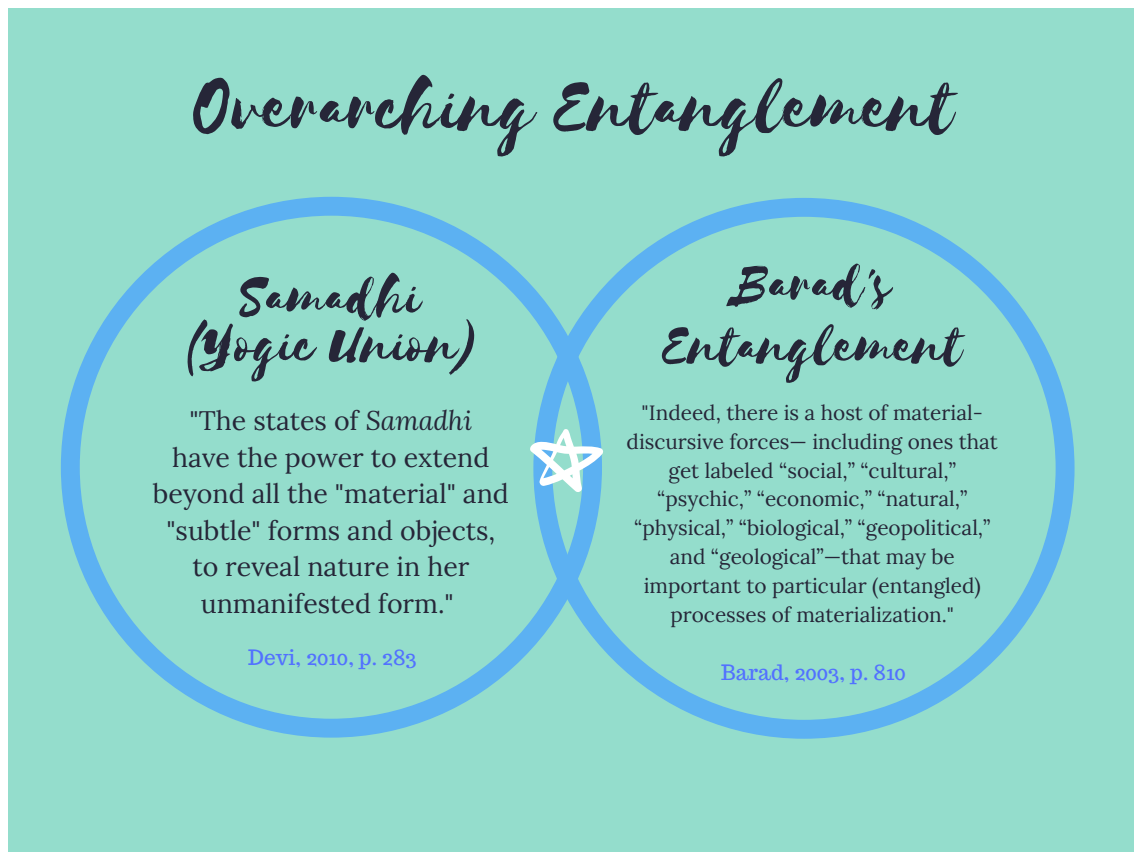


Figure 5: Overarching entanglement

Yoga philosophy and feminist theory are not the same. As illustrated throughout this thesis, they are bodies of knowledge that have generated through different historical influences and present conditions. However, there are similarities that make it possible to locate dialogues between these two worlds. Definitions of terms in Yoga literature often feature descriptions of divine experiences in daily life, descriptions in feminist new materialisms (and in particular by Barad) favour theoretical language. Between theory and experience, I found a space where I could design a rich methodology for researching lifestyles.

Adopting yogic union and entanglement as my philosophical stance impacted my ontological assumptions and my subsequent approach to epistemology and ethics. I considered all elements of this research to be intra-acting and contributing towards the learning that was being acquired through this ethnography. While initially, I understood that 'enlightenment' and 'universal oneness' were aspects of Yoga practice that might be influencing practitioners, I did not anticipate the extent that these concepts would present themselves in this ethnography. Adopting theories from feminist new

materialisms arose as increasingly relevant alongside insights I was gathering from the women on their experiences of yogic union.

As this research progressed, I became increasingly aware of my position in each interaction, the materiality that was both present and contributing, and the sensory, embodied, entangled experiences I was mutually implicated in throughout this process. This understanding grew over the course of this ethnography alongside insights I gathered from the women. Future research on Yoga lifestyles might benefit from acknowledging interconnectivity from the onset. This could result in a different research design and process that may offer opportunity to gain much richer understandings of the complex influences present in each moment of a Yoga lifestyle.

Using entanglement as a research process required “reading widely across philosophy, social theories, and the history of science and social science to find concepts that reorient thinking” (St. Pierre, 2019, p. 3). The complex and broad approach of an entangled ethnography opened my eyes to the Yoga lifestyle as a moving, breathing, continually expanding reality that the women are a part of. This methodology enabled me to gather a wide range of deep insights into the women’s Yoga lifestyles. In the analysis of this material, my continual process of becoming lost and found while immersing myself amongst the findings encouraged me to pay attention to embodied, affective responses (MacLure, 2010, 2013a, 2013b). Paying attention to what MacLure (2010) describes as “glow” I found a way to dialogue between theory and experience to reveal findings that I could not have anticipated at the beginning of this ethnography. Below, I present the main findings that arose out of this research. Similar to the lives of the women in this study, my findings are not succinct, nor are they static. Rather, in describing key contributions, I consider the breadth of knowledge gained, an inability to arrive at singular truths, and the fallacy of a prescriptive Yoga lifestyle.

## **Key findings: Reconceptualising lifestyle, embodiment and ethics**

In Chapter One I also asked the following research questions, “what is a contemporary Yoga lifestyle?” and “how are women who are experienced Yoga practitioners adopting, adapting, and/or navigating teachings from both ancient and contemporary sources to build Yoga lifestyles throughout their daily lives?” Through this entangled ethnography,

I gained nuanced insights from the women into their multi-faceted lives to understand how the teachings of Yoga are being lived by contemporary women. Reflecting on the findings that arose out of this methodology reveals numerous ways that this work can expand upon previous understandings.

Through this research I entangled embodied experiences, feminist theory and creative writing styles to evoke emotional engagement and promote different ways of knowing. Like many feminist scholars before me, my choices in this research challenge authority over knowledge that remains predominantly male and provides space for a wider range of voices to share their insights (Barbour, 2004, 2018b; Braidotti, 2005; Fullagar, 2019; Markula, 2014; Thorpe, 2008; Vertinsky & Hedenborg, 2019). Using embodied and entangled methods represented by a mixture of structured and creative writing, I am broadening understandings of what counts as knowledge and whose voices matter. Working with theories that acknowledge the varied experiences of women, I am extending upon the feminist traditions of questioning whose knowledge is included and then making space for those voices who are not (Barret, 2015; Bost, 2016; Ellis, 2004; Humberstone & Cutler-Riddick, 2015; Pavlidis & Olive, 2014).

In a discussion on Yoga lifestyles, these are all valuable contributions to a body of literature that is continually expanding. Focusing this research on lifestyles instead of specific practices allowed this inquiry to gather a range of information on the varied experiences women are having throughout their lives. This research considers the many aspects of daily life that women practitioners are navigating and includes these within the discussion on what constitutes contemporary Yoga. The findings offered are the result of multiple methods that draw upon moments throughout an entire Yoga lifestyle, not only those practices found on Yoga mats and in studio spaces. As such, this research broadens understandings of Yoga to illustrate how these practices are woven throughout the daily lives of contemporary practitioners as ongoing navigations of teachings that influence lifestyle decisions.

In the introduction chapter, I presented themes of lifestyles, embodiment and ethics. These three concepts have been problematised and expanded upon over the course of this thesis. Following these concepts through the journey of this thesis beginning in the introduction chapter, extended in methodology and analysed in separate findings

chapters, I now reflect on how these concepts have cumulatively expanded throughout these pages to arrive at reconceptualised understandings. Below, I offer key findings and contributions to knowledge that arose through my journey analysing these topics in an entangled Yoga lifestyle ethnography.

### ***Rethinking lifestyles and disrupting notions of ‘the’ Yoga lifestyle***

In this thesis, I began by conceptualising the term ‘lifestyle’ as choices made by groups of individuals with similar values, attitudes and dispositions (Stebbins, 1997; Wheaton, 2010). In my desire to learn about the values of women Yoga practitioners, I was curious as to what extent a range of influences that are both ancient and contemporary might be influencing their decisions. Previous understandings of ‘Yoga lifestyles’ in popular and academic texts describe these ways of life through regimented, uniform practices (Khalsa et al., 2009; Yadav et al., 2012). Lifestyles as understood in other physical cultures featured discussions around power and consumptive practices (Olive, 2015b; Wheaton, 2000, 2010). This work expands these limited distinctions and presents the women’s Yoga lifestyles as broad, individual, nuanced ways of life that are driven by a desire to act with integrity amongst varied pressures to conform. This journey in lifestyles is described below.

As this research progressed, I began to uncover the multiple influences and power structures that the women are navigating in their Yoga lifestyles. I revealed how the women are resolving tensions that arise as they situate Yoga lifestyles as spiritual practices for increasing self-awareness in the contexts of commercially-driven, contemporary worlds. However, even though the women described facing tensions, I did not want to perpetuate a binary of ‘traditional’ versus ‘commercial’ Yoga. The idea that a traditional practice is being upheld and that commercial lifestyles are less valid was challenged. In understanding both ancient and contemporary teachings as influences that are simultaneously contributing to lifestyle practices that are at the same time traditional and commercial, I disrupt any artificial binary. In this thesis, I move beyond socio-cultural analyses, discussions of power, and questions around consumptive choices to consider lifestyles more broadly. This work extends and considers how the women’s lives are intricately connected to experiences that are at the same time social, cultural, natural, environmental, political and emotional.

I was able to broaden discussion around lifestyle by using a range of methods through an entangled ethnography that considered more than solely human influences. I immersed myself deeply alongside the women for 14 months to uncover the complexity of everyday life. This work moves beyond previously conceived notions of women living with Yoga as a predominantly physical practice and considers how a range of teachings are being lived by the women as they embody teachings on a continual basis through moments that are both ‘mundane’ and ‘transcendent,’ influenced by entities that are both human and non-human.

In this research, I also disrupt ancient descriptions of Yoga lifestyles as linear progressions towards enlightenment and uncover how the women’s journeys in Yoga illustrate ongoing navigations towards a changing sense of self in an intricately interconnected world. Their journeys are not tidily leading on a road towards bliss; they are messy, complex and equally as joyous as they are challenging. The women experience despair and elation while contending with pressures of consumerism and neoliberal achievement alongside efforts to maintain values (like kindness) that are upheld in the Yoga community.

Through this work, I demonstrate how contemporary women practitioners are moving away from rigid recommendations for living ‘the’ Yoga lifestyle as recommended in guide books. They are disrupting the traditional lineage of male authority and are finding pathways inspired by practices of ‘authenticity’ and Yoga lifestyles of integrity. This thesis expands understandings of lifestyles as commonly shared practices by a large group of women with similar habits and considers how following teachings that encourage self-awareness can ultimately bring women towards more confidence and autonomy as they choose practices that are suitable for their individual needs. The women of this study are finding their own meanings, they consider the teachings to be ‘tools not rules’ and are redefining what is meant by the term ‘good’ yogi. These ‘good’ yogis are not forcing themselves to fit amongst narrow stereotypes of Yoga and Yoga lifestyles. Rather, these women illustrate that living a contemporary Yoga lifestyle is less about which particular teachings are ‘essential’ and more about choosing appropriate ‘tools’ (practices) that feel ‘authentic’ (personally relevant) for each woman.



### ***Rethinking embodiment and reconceptualising a ‘Yoga body’***

In the beginning of this thesis, I described how I am conceptualising the term ‘embodiment’ in this research as a practice of non-duality and a way of knowing (Barbour, 2004). I illustrated how feminists are prioritising embodiment in research and using embodied ways of knowing as a method for understanding more broadly conceived lived experiences. Embodiment in this research drew upon scholarship that considers lived experiences as intricately interconnected and complex (Barad, 2007; Barbour, 2018b; Braidotti, 2013; Grosz, 1994). I described how embodied research can be a political choice to situate women’s bodies in positions of power as valuable sources of knowledge and indicated how this work prioritises rethinking the ‘Yoga body’ as a contribution to this literature (Throsby, 2013).

In this thesis, I extended upon feminist embodiment research and sensory ethnographic projects to consider how the concept of embodiment can be included in discussions arising out of feminist new materialisms. There are many critical debates around these ‘new’ theories and some critiques surround the potential trivialisation of difference in research that diminishes individuals to common materiality (Ahmed, 2008; Barad, 2014; Fullagar, 2020; Van der Tuin, 2014). Through my research, I presented a way through this debate. I suggested that the women’s lived experiences in Yoga lifestyles are both interconnected and individual. While concepts of entanglement (Barad, 2007) and posthuman knowing subjects (Braidotti, 2013) include both human and non-human materiality, they do not diminish the importance of individual histories that are influencing continual becomings.

As well as progressing ideas around embodiment, I also problematised the concept of a ‘Yoga body’ through Barad’s (2007) understanding of an intra-acting, entangled existence. The Yoga body also develops over the course of this thesis. Definitions evolve in this thesis from descriptions of women’s Yoga bodies as objects for transcendence in ancient texts, to Yoga bodies appearing in contemporary imagery as lithe, lean, young forms demonstrating athletic and gymnastic feats, towards understandings of intricately entangled matter as intra-acting, shifting and unbound by the limitations of flesh and form. This rethinking of a Yoga body challenges previous representations of women’s Yoga bodies as objects and illustrates how contemporary women’s Yoga bodies are divine sources of inspiration and knowledge. Below, I

expand on this journey towards reconceptualising a ‘Yoga body.’

After years of living Yoga lifestyles, the women of this study are gaining embodied understandings of Yoga as union. To bring the women’s embodied knowledge of union into an academic discussion, I used Karen Barad’s (2007) concept of entanglement. Contemplating entanglements as phenomena that are arising through continual intra-actions between all materiality helps to articulate the women’s experiences of yogic union. In describing yogic union as a connection between a materiality that is both human and non-human, I suggest that a ‘Yoga body’ is always entangled. In this research, I demonstrate how an ‘entangled Yoga body’ blurs the boundaries of human form and presents the potential for broadening ideas around embodied experiences as increasingly complex and intricately interconnected.

Bringing the women’s experiences as entangled Yoga bodies to life through evocative writing pushes boundaries of previous definitions and offers an innovative strategy for representing complex, interconnected, lived experiences. The examples I use in this thesis (breath, Yoga mats and the heart), and my style of engaging with them, demonstrate how creative writing, multiple knowledges and vulnerable reflexivity can foster interesting discussions and present new opportunities for articulating complex entangled experiences that include more than human materiality. In my attempts at broadening understandings of both embodiment and Yoga bodies, I illustrate how there are many influences in any given situation that are at the same time emotional, physical, environmental, historical, political, social and cultural. This research extends understandings of lived experiences in Yoga throughout daily life to contemplate the ways that the women’s bodies are mutually implicated with non-human aspects of lived experiences. Further, the entanglements described illustrate how both human and non-human materiality are agentic and intra-acting in a state of continual becoming.

### ***Rethinking ethics and the importance of affirmation***

Another key theme that developed over the course of this thesis is ethics. In Chapter One, I defined ethics as moral codes and described my interest in uncovering how the women practitioners might be influenced by both morality as defined in Yoga culture and simultaneously making sense of these codes through their individual interpretations. Throughout this thesis, I featured ethical guidelines from the *Yoga sūtras of Patañjali*

(as one of the most popular Yoga lifestyle systems in circulation today). Through this inquiry, I was interested in uncovering the ways that the women were navigating ancient teachings in contemporary times and was intrigued by the ways that these adaptations might be creating new interpretations.

As a feminist ethnographer researching Yoga, ethics were also considered in the design of this research. In this entangled ethnographic design many principles were considered and often these included ethical Yoga practices (for example *ahimsā*/kindness). In my discussion of ethics as applied in this research context, I drew upon Barad's (2007) definition of an ethico-onto-epistemology that considers ways of being, knowing and doing to be intricately intra-acting in lived experiences. Throughout this research, I embodied an ontology of union, an epistemology of embodiment and an ethics of care. Allowing these three aspects to cumulatively inform my engagement in this research significantly influenced the insights I gained. This unique ethico-onto-epistemological combination fostered deep connections with the women, and these in turn, resulted in a rich body of empirical material for analysis. Considering ethics carefully throughout this process, I found that embodying vulnerability and honesty in close relationships was a way that I could practice care and empathy towards the women of this study throughout the entirety of this research.

In my findings, I illustrated how Yoga lifestyles are not defined by daily lives informed by uniform practices. The women are not all adhering to vegan diets or regimented movement schedules, rather, I found that the specific practices of the women's Yoga lifestyles were inspired by an ethical code that was based on their reconceptualisation of ancient teachings. Drawing upon Braidotti's (2019) writing on affirmative ethics, I illustrate how contemporary ethical teachings that the women are embodying through their daily Yoga lifestyles are generative and affirmative. This project reveals how the values that are informing contemporary women's choices in daily life are both "completely present and completely antiquated" (Braidotti, 2019, p. 468). The women's understandings of Yoga's ethical teachings are simultaneously contemporary, ancient and framed in affirmative language.

My description of ethics as guiding principles informing women's lifestyles challenges notions of Yoga practices as teachings for movement that are characterised by discipline

and austerity. I highlight how the women's Yoga lifestyles are not uniformly characterised by early mornings and long rigorous physical practices, rather, what defines a contemporary Yoga lifestyle is a continual dedication to living alongside affirmative ethical teachings as reworded by the women in favour of positive attributes towards future becomings. Where previous definitions of Yoga lifestyles (and teachings) may have used language promoting strict regimes, the women's contemporary definitions demonstrate how today's practitioners are prioritising affirmative ethics and much variation. Through continued, considered attempts at living lives of kindness (*ahimsā*), simplicity (*saucha*) and acceptance (*santosha*), the women of this study are making choices that are leading them towards futures they are actively contributing to.

Whether the women's Yoga lifestyles include having friends over for dinner, volunteering at local non-profit organisations, practicing care in long *āsana* sequences or putting flowers in a vase at their local studio, these everyday ethical acts of affirmation are what define contemporary Yoga lifestyles. In this chapter, I further challenged the notion that all acts of activism must be vocal and large. Through the women's examples of living with kindness and care, I illustrated how quiet and small (as well as large and loud) ethically-informed acts are all contributing to lifestyles based on affirmative values. Though no two Yoga lifestyles are alike, the women are similarly hoping that their actions, no matter the size, are contributing to a more kind and conscientious world.

## **Future directions**

Tensions arose throughout this research process. Navigating paradigms and posthuman theory while immersed amongst a feminist embodied ethnography on Yoga prompted complex discussions around the uses of theory in research and the potential interconnectivity of existence. The women's experiences of Yoga as practices that could bring them moments of union demanded theory that could support the analysis of lives being impacted by both human and non-human materiality. After reading through a range of theory, I decided upon theorists that were igniting affective responses and used these embodied experiences in my process of analysis. By entangling myself amongst feminist theory, empirical material and embodied experiences as ongoing processes of inquiry, I was able to find pathways towards representations of findings that help

broaden understandings on women's contemporary Yoga lifestyles.

In this thesis, I have taken chances and found ways to creatively honour the deep, complex, personal interactions I shared with the women. I was inspired to find theories and styles of representation that could articulate the women's rich and complex experiences. This encouraged me to imagine new possibilities for academic writing on women's contemporary Yoga lifestyles. My interactions with the women and the feminist theory I was engaging with influenced my embodied and emotional connection to the research. Inspired by MacLure's discussions around the value of affect in analysis (2010, 2013a, 2013b), I allowed bodily intensities to inform my choices alongside cerebral thematic coding processes. My ongoing entanglement dialoguing between theory and experience combined to produce an innovative and intimate articulation of findings. I appreciate the depth of knowledge I acquired through this process and acknowledge ways that both humanist methodological structure and posthuman theory equally contributed towards reconceptualising Yoga lifestyles and broadening understandings of women's experiences in this research. Beyond this, I also understand that there are many ways that different approaches and processes have the potential to expand upon these findings.

Reflecting on this research and the knowledge I have now attained on women's expansive experiences in Yoga, I see potential for engaging with a wider range of innovative methods that can enable further insight into the materiality of a Yoga lifestyle. Though theories for conceiving of an entanglement of matter are intriguing, the dialogue I was able to build was limited by the methods I worked with (interviews, focus groups, journals and observations). As mentioned previously, I did not anticipate the extent that feminist new materialisms and associated concepts (like entanglement) would present themselves as important in this research setting. With the knowledge I have gained, I see benefit in situating Yoga research in a diffractive analysis (Barad, 2007). Using diffractive analysis in future research could encourage a wider range of methods and techniques for analysis. Adding methods that promote more movement and engagement with a range of both human and non-human materiality using different collection strategies (for example video and/or sound recordings) could potentially open this discussion to more depth.

In hindsight, I would have seen benefit in inquiring more broadly around movement and materiality through a wider variety of artistic methods. Looking back over my reflections and the moments that touched me deeply, I further recognise opportunity to expand upon shared movement experiences with the group of women. The insights gathered through these experiences touch on the learning that can be gained through bodies and materialities that are not linguistically defined. There are many ways that future research on Yoga lifestyles can expand to broaden understandings around women, bodies and contemporary lifestyles. The aforementioned recommendations offer ways that this work can continue to expand in further entangled ethnographies.

### **Reflexivity, embodying vulnerability and generative ethics**

I finish by reflecting on my personal process as an embodied and entangled researcher in a feminist ethnography on Yoga lifestyles. Researching as a feminist, I was cognisant of the importance of reflexivity (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007; Roulston, 2010). As a woman studying movement cultures, I was inspired by recent feminist research that featured accounts of moving, reflecting and collaborating to come to understandings about physical cultures while sharing similar experiences in movement and in academia (Olive & Thorpe, 2011; Thorpe, Barbour & Bruce, 2011). Thinking through increasing awareness around complex dynamics in research settings prompted me to consider my attempts at reflexivity in this project.

Throughout this research process, I have maintained an interest in exposing my ‘blind spots’ to rework my previously unquestioned assumptions around Yoga. Pagis (2009) writes on the challenge of witnessing self and recommends becoming involved in practices of meditation that allow the researcher to observe embodied sensations. As an experienced practitioner in the Yoga community, I am familiar with these techniques and recognise how they assisted in this process of reflection. This did not, however, exclude me from embodying cultural norms. It took much considered effort to recognise the values and practices that were unique to Yoga. This is a challenge researchers face as intimate insiders in the community they are studying (Pavlidis & Olive, 2014). Beyond increasing my awareness of ‘blind spots,’ I was continually reflecting on my application of methods to conscientiously disrupt any power structures being built between myself (as the researcher) and the women (as participants).

While reflexivity in research is considered a definitive feature of quality qualitative research, some academic scholars are encouraging more consideration around why reflexivity is being used in research and to what end (Pillow, 2003; 2015b; Pringle & Thorpe, 2017). Pillow (2015b), suggests that reflexivity in research needs to move beyond self-indulgent, self-reflection and instead “compile detailed archives of experiences of ongoing disparities” (p. 431). She encourages thinking through the how and why of reflexivity in research and promotes a consideration of tensions that are both theoretical and embodied. Pringle and Thorpe (2017) extend upon this to suggest that reflexivity in future movement culture research could benefit in extending beyond methods of self-reflection that are comfortable and “towards more postmodern understandings of ourselves, and our participants, as ‘multiple, as unknowable, as shifting’” (p. 37).

In thinking through my process of reflexivity in this ethnography, I offer a response to research that questions the extent to which an individual can be reflexive (Pagis, 2009; Pillow, 2015b). In this study, I worked with a multi-faceted reflexive process that included a range of techniques and this enabled more breadth in my personal reflections. My reflections benefitted from working with others, finding solitude, breathing, connecting with nature and a range of varied aspects that all contributed to my growing understandings of Yoga lifestyles. Techniques I employed for reflexive research practices are contained in Appendix 15. They include a range of experiences that are social, embodied, solitary, loud and quiet.

Many of the reflexive techniques I engaged with were inspired by Yoga. Researchers interested in engaging a multi-method reflexivity may find more relevance in different practices for self-reflection and I recommend finding methods that are personally meaningful for each unique researcher. However, I also recognise how feminist scholars engaging with theories of new materialisms may find benefit immersing themselves in practices that can potentially encourage a mind-body-beyond connection (like Yoga). In my own experiences, I found benefit in considering the influence of multi-faceted methods for reflexivity through practices that claimed to offer connection. I further appreciated finding opportunities for self-reflection that removed me from comfortable positions of power and situated me in vulnerable positions of learning.

The most important feature through all of my personal experiences in reflexivity was my ability to remain vulnerable and dive into experiences that could challenge my comfort on multiple levels. Pringle and Thorpe (2017) and Pillow (2003) similarly encourage a move away from comfort to locate new spaces in self and in research. In my reflexive processes, I experienced many moments where I was challenged to reassess emotional, physical, theoretical, cultural and environmental assumptions. This willingness to fail and rebuild in all aspects of my involvement allowed this research to evolve as it has. My process in this ethnography mirrors the journeys of both feminisms and Yoga over time as it has allowed me to critically examine my surroundings, make attempts at new understandings, fall backwards, get lost and find myself anew in a non-linear process of learning.

### **Affirmative ethics: Towards hope and future becomings**

In the third ‘findings’ chapter of this thesis, I described how the women of this study are reworking ancient ethical practices of Yoga and reframing teachings into affirmative everyday ethical decisions. The women practitioners of this study are finding ways to live personally meaningful lives informed by practices of kindness and Yoga lifestyles based on integrity. In reflecting on this entire research process, I considered qualities that were instrumental in the ongoing development of this inquiry. Reading through my notes, a consistent theme that I circled in numerous pages is that of ‘hope.’ My interactions with the women, over the entirety of this ethnography, continually filled me with hope for this research and for the future. Therefore, I choose to finish this thesis with a discussion on hope as a quality that can benefit a researcher, and as an encouraging mindset when considering the becoming of our world.

In the conclusion chapter to Sarah Ahmed’s (2017) *Living a Feminist Life* she outlines eight practices that are helping her to survive as a feminist academic. In this final section, I offer hope as my primary practice for surviving the process of feminist research. Hope, as instilled by interactions with the women, provided me with continual reminders that this research is valuable. Further, the women’s hopeful and optimistic beliefs for the future reminded me that Yoga remains a worthwhile pursuit in contemporary times as practices that encourage more moments of experiencing hope.



In Barbour's (2018a) writing she challenges the discursive formations of achievement and productivity in academia weaving through various writing styles, using poetry, metaphor, theory and affect. In doing so, she welcomes readers into the exhausting reality of juggling multiple roles. Comparing this to the imagery of a storm, she suggests that she is able to locate methods that provide her shelter through turbulent times. She describes how collaboratively engaging with like-minded colleagues and immersing in creative and innovative research processes allows her to survive the storm of neoliberal academia and reach towards hope.

Braidotti (2005) writes on hope in academia suggesting that "feminist intellectual and political energies are converging on the ethical project of contributing to the construction of social horizons of hope" (p. 178). In reflecting on my journey researching Yoga lifestyles alongside contemporary women practitioners, I recognise the importance of hope as a powerful affective experience that greatly influenced my process of inquiry. Witnessing the women's continual efforts to practice kindness in challenging situations, to face tensions and respond in thoughtful ways that might inspire change, I was continually inspired to commit to actions throughout my daily life that might also contribute to a world I hoped to be a part of.

Today, the practice of Yoga remains extremely beneficial to a growing population of practitioners and those living this lifestyle are continually journeying along pathways of authenticity and connection, considering their place amongst the becoming of the world. The women of this research are embodying practices of Yoga as teachings that can bring moments of union. In their understandings of union, they are choosing affirmative ethical actions throughout their daily lives. The quality that keeps the women inspired to maintain these ways of living in the world is hope. The women of this study have hope that their actions are building towards peace and ease in increasingly turbulent times. Importantly, they are not passively hopeful but actively engaging in their social and political worlds through decisions based on the premise of hope.

At the onset of this doctoral research, hope drove the decision to inquire alongside practitioners. Throughout this process, hope from the women energised me through long working hours and questions of worthiness. Their hope fuelled this project and consistently reminded me that it is important to believe in an affirmative, collaborative

future. They are not naïve women talking about ‘love’ and ‘bliss’ from behind the veneer of privilege. Many of the women in this study have faced (and continue to face) hardships. Through their practices, they are finding hope to hold on to and a mutual becoming to believe in. As Braidotti (2013) writes:

Hope is a way of dreaming up possible futures: an anticipatory virtue that permeates our lives and activates them. It is a powerful motivating force grounded not only in projects that aim at reconstructing the social imaginary, but also in the political economy of desires, affects and creativity that underscore it. (p. 192)

Hope is a powerful motivating force that has the potential to ignite imagination and encourage creative projects towards possible futures. Contemporary Yoga has many interpretations, and these are as complex as the researcher writing about them. The world within which we are living presents us with innumerable challenging situations. Even attempting to live in ways that are not economically driven by capitalist and/or neo-liberal aims can (at times) be met with cynicism. The women of this study provide examples of continued hope in contemporary times. They believe in affirmative futures and remain dedicated to lifestyles that are increasing their awareness so that they can better contribute towards futures that are connected and conscientious.

Maintaining a belief in the world’s potential, the women embody hope and believe in a positive future becoming that can be built upon kindness. With new practitioners committing to the teachings of Yoga lifestyles, this community is growing and the number of individuals building lives on hope is likely expanding. Thinking of a growing critical mass of individuals who believe in connection and inclusion whilst navigating their lived experiences through practices that encourage authenticity and empathy, is uplifting. Knowing that these women are in the world consistently believing in and contributing towards an affirmative future gives hope for the becoming of our world.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Glossary of terminology

The terms contained inside this glossary are transliterations of *Sanskrit* words used throughout this thesis. Due to the variation in transliterations found online (and in academic publications), I have decided upon the versions included below and have maintained consistency throughout this thesis (unless otherwise noted). Brief guidelines for accent pronunciation include: ā (palm), ī (seek), ṇ (gentle), ñ (onion), ṭ (stable) (FMT Translation Services, 2019). Translations of terminology are informed by various texts and the women’s lived experiences in this study. Sources are cited after each interpretation.

**Ahimsā:** “Reverence, love, compassion for all” (Devi, 2010, p. 287), “non-injury” (Satchidananda, 1978, p. 237), kindness (translation informed by the women of this study).

**Anāhata:** The heart chakra (see ‘chakra’ below).

**Aparigraha:** “Awareness of abundance, fulfillment” (Devi, 2010, p. 287), “non-greed, non-hoarding, non-acceptance of gifts” (Satchidananda, 1978, p. 237), abundance (translation informed by the women of this study).

**Āsana:** “Comfort in being, posture” (Devi, 2010, p. 286), “pose, seat” (Satchidananda, 1978, p. 238), Bodily positions (translation informed by the women of this study).

**Ashtanga-vinyāsa:** The system of Yoga designed by Pattabhi Jois. This phrase helps to differentiate his specific style from the 8-limb pathway of *ashtanga* Yoga that is described in the *Yoga sūtras of Patañjali* (see Appendix 3). Pattabhi Jois’ system is inspired by the *Yoga sūtras* but only represents one way to practice the 8-limb path of *ashtanga* Yoga. Jois designed six series of specific Yoga *āsana* sequences that increase in difficulty. In 1948 he opened his Yoga institute in Mysore, India (see ‘Mysore’ below). This style became increasingly popular into the 1970s and remains widely practiced today (De Michelis, 2004).

**Asteya:** “Generosity, honesty” (Devi, 2010, p. 287), “non-stealing” (Satchidananda, 1978, p. 238), gratitude (translation informed by the women of this study).

**Bhakti:** One of the original lineages of Yoga. Bhakti Yoga is the pathway of devotion (Feuerstein, 2003).

**Brahmacharya:** “Balance and moderation of the vital life force” (Devi, 2010, p. 287), “continence, sense control, celibacy” (Satchidananda, 1978, p. 238), conserving energy (translation informed by the women of this study).

**Chakra:** Energy centers of the body as defined within the *tantra* Yoga system. In recent years, academic scholars are investigating potential relationships between yogic knowledge of chakras and modern scientific understandings of the nervous and endocrine systems (Jain, 2010).

**Dhāranā:** “Gathering and focusing of consciousness inward” (Devi, 2010), “concentration” (Satchidananda, 1978, p. 239), turning inwards (translation informed by the women of this study).

**Dhyanā:** “Continuous inward flow of consciousness” (Devi, 2010, p. 286), meditation (translation informed by the women of this study).

**Drishti:** Focused gaze often used during Yoga *āsana* classes as a practice of concentration directed to one-point (*pratyāhāra*).

**Hatha:** A style of Yoga that is often referred to in contemporary studios as a slower style of practice. The lineage for this style originates in the ancient Yoga text, the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*. The *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* is often considered to be the first text that includes physical practices. It is often attributed with the initial expansion of Yoga *āsana*. Some practitioners consider all physical practices to be *hatha*. There is much confusion over the use of this word as it is used to describe both a slower style of practice and in reference to the supposed origin of body positions from the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (Feuerstein, 2003). Similar to *ashtanga*, the word *hatha* is used variously as both a style of practice and a lineage connected to an ancient text.

**Hybrid Yoga:** Hybrid Yoga is a recent term being used by those who are not affiliating with a particular Yoga lineage. These practices are inspired by many styles and the specific ‘hybrid’ is based on the definition of the individual.

**Ishvara Pranidhana:** “Wholehearted dedication to the divine” (Devi, 2010, p. 287), “worship of God or self-surrender” (Satchidananda, 1978, p. 240), faith (translation informed by the women of this study).

**Jñāna:** One of the original lineages of Yoga. Jñāna Yoga is the pathway of wisdom (Feuerstein, 2003).

**Karma:** One of the original lineages of Yoga. Karma Yoga is the pathway of service (Feuerstein, 2003).

**Kirtan:** Devotional singing (translation informed by the women of this study).

**Kriya:** An action, or series of actions. In *Kundalini* Yoga a *kriya* is a series of body postures, breath and sound put into action with an intended outcome (Stoeber, 2012).

**Kriya Yoga:** Defined as the Yoga of action. It is a style of Yoga that gained international recognition through Paramahansa Yogananda's (1946) book *Autobiography of a Yogi*.

**Kundalini Yoga:** A style of Yoga developed and popularised in the West by Yogi Bhajan (Stoeber, 2012). The term *kundalini* refers to a divine energy that is thought to be stored at the base of the spine.

**Mantra:** "Sacred sound vibration" (Devi, 2010, p. 68), "a sound formula for meditation" (Satchidananda, 1978, p. 242), chanting ancient texts, repetition of affirmations (translations informed by the women of this study). Ancient understandings of *mantra* connect to verses from the *Rig Veda* (see below), traditionally repeated 108 times with the help of mala beads (108 beads on a string). Some contemporary practitioners interpret *mantra* to mean 'affirmation.' In these cases, the term *mantra* is referencing any phrase and/or word repeated with intention.

**Mysore practice and Mysore, India:** Some students of the *Ashtanga-vinyāsa* (see above) lineage make pilgrimages to Mysore, India to practice Pattabhi Jois' sequences at his original studio. Mysore is also the name attributed to the practice that these students participate in. Going to a 'traditional' Mysore class one can expect to a silent, individual practice where sequences are memorised and practiced at the student's own pace. Teachers are there to guide and adjust but not to lead.

**Namasté:** A customary greeting that is used in India. In contemporary Yoga classes, this saying has been adapted and used at the end of class. In these settings it is often translated as bowing to the divine in another.

**Niyamas:** "Evolution toward harmony" (Devi, 2010, p. 286), "observance" (Satchidananda, 1978, p. 243), affirmative action (translation informed by the women of this study).



**Prāṇāyāma:** Breathing exercises (translation informed by the women of this study), “enhancement and guidance of universal *prana* (energy)” (Devi, 2010, p. 286), “the practice of controlling vital force, usually through control of the breath” (Satchidananda, 1978, p. 243).

**Pratyāhāra:** “Encouraging the senses to draw within” (Devi, 2010, p. 286), “sense control, withdrawal of the senses from their objects” (Satchidananda, 1978, p. 244), mindfulness (as present moment sensory awareness) (translation informed by the women of this study).

**Raja:** Raja Yoga is a style that was popularised by Vivekananda in the late 1800s, as inspired by his interpretation of the *Yoga sūtras of Patañjali*. The word itself can be translated as ‘king’ (Feuerstein, 2003).

**Rig Veda samhita or Rig Veda or Rg Veda:** The earliest known text in South Asian literature (written around fifteenth century B.C.E.) and attributed with the first written account of Yoga practices (Jain, 2014).

**Sadhana:** “Spiritual practice” (Satchidananda, 1978, p. 244), Yoga practice (translation inspired by the women of this study).

**Samādhi:** “Union with divine consciousness” (Devi, 2010, p. 286), “contemplation, superconscious state, absorption” (Satchidananda, 1978, p. 245), oneness, euphoria, bliss, union (translations informed by the women of this study).

**Santosh:** “Contentment, being at peace with oneself and others” (Devi, 2010, p. 287), “contentment” (Satchidananda, 1978, p. 245), active acceptance (translation informed by the women of this study).

**Satya:** “Truthfulness, integrity” (Devi, 2010, p. 287), “truth, truthfulness” (Satchidananda, 1978, p. 245), authenticity as the quality of integrity (translation informed by the women of this study).

**Saucha:** “Simplicity, purity, refinement” (Devi, 2010, p. 287), “purity” (Satchidananda, 1978, p. 245), simplicity (translation informed by the women of this study).

**Savasana:** Also translated as “corpse pose” (Satchidananda, 1978, p. 246). It is a Yoga *āsana* that requires practitioners to lie on the floor as comfortably as possible. Often the final pose of a led Yoga *āsana* class.

**Shakti:** “Cosmic feminine force” (Morley, 2008, p. 159).

**Shala:** Yoga studio.

- Svadyaya:** “Sacred study of the divine through scripture, nature and introspection” (Devi, 2010, p. 287), “spiritual study” (Satchidananda, 1978, p. 246), increasing awareness (translation informed by the women of this study).
- Tapas:** “Igniting the purifying flame” (Devi, 2010, p. 287), “spiritual austerity, accepting but not causing pain” (Satchidananda, 1978, p. 247).
- Tantra Yoga:** “Tantrism could be understood in historical terms as (1) a mode of experience rooted in archaic matriarchal shamanism, and (2) an identifiable medieval movement (starting in the seventh and eighth centuries) involving alchemical/medical strategies for transforming the body to achieve salvation.” (Morley, 2008, p. 155)
- Trāṭak:** Candle gazing (translation from Kakini). Meditating while gazing at a candle flame (Desikachar, Bragdon & Bossart, 2005).
- Ujjayi:** A *prāṇāyāma* (see above) that requires the practitioner to breath in and out of the nose while restricting the back of the throat. This results in a wave-like noise that creates an audible *pratyāhāra* (see above) used during Yoga practice.
- Vinyāsa:** A number of *āsana* placed in sequences. Often referenced as a style of practice that includes variations of sun salutations and steady movement.
- Yamas:** “Reflection of our true nature” (Devi, 2010, p. 286), “abstinence” (Satchidananda, 1978, p. 248), reflections of authenticity (translation informed by the women of this study).
- Yoga nidra:** Guided deep relaxation.
- Yoga sūtras of Patañjali:** The most widely referenced, user-friendly set of verses describing the 8-limb pathway (or lifestyle) of Yoga. It is a condensed version of the *Rig Veda* with the vast teachings being contained within 196 short sentences (*sūtras*). Each of Patañjali’s *sūtras* (verses) contain rich knowledge and have been subject to numerous interpretations (Bryant, 2015; Desikachar, 1995; Devi, 2010; Iyengar, 1993; Satchidananda, 1978), each offering their unique translations of these “pregnant half-sentences” (Feuerstein & Wilber, 1998, p. 119). This text has essentially provided the world with what is now being heralded as a ‘pseudo guidebook’ describing how to live one version of the Yoga lifestyle (Singleton, 2010).
- Yoginī:** A woman Yoga practitioner (Serbaeva, 2015; White, 2012).

## Appendix 2: Recruitment poster



**ARE YOU A FEMALE YOGA PRACTITIONER OVER THE AGE OF 18 YEARS?**

**HAVE YOU BEEN ATTEMPTING TO LIVE THE YOGA LIFESTYLE FOR OVER 5 YEARS?**

**ARE YOU INTERESTED IN JOINING A GROUP OF WAIKATO YOGIS WITHIN A RESEARCH STUDY ON THE YOGA LIFESTYLE?**

If you answered yes to all of the above questions, I would love to hear from you. My name is Allison Jeffrey. I am a PhD candidate at the University of Waikato and am looking for individuals who are interested in joining both myself and a group of local Yogis over the course of a year-long investigation into the lives of contemporary Yoga practitioners.

I am looking for people who are adopting and adapting the Yoga lifestyle from a variety of disciplines. Please note, you do not have to be an 'expert' in any of the practices you are engaging with. A keen interest and a commitment to living this lifestyle with all of its ups and downs are the qualities I am searching for.

I am aware that as practitioners and professionals, our lives are very busy and have adjusted my research to accommodate for this. Minimally, I am asking individuals to meet with me and chat about the Yoga lifestyle 3 times over the course of the year. There will be opportunity to expand on this if you like.

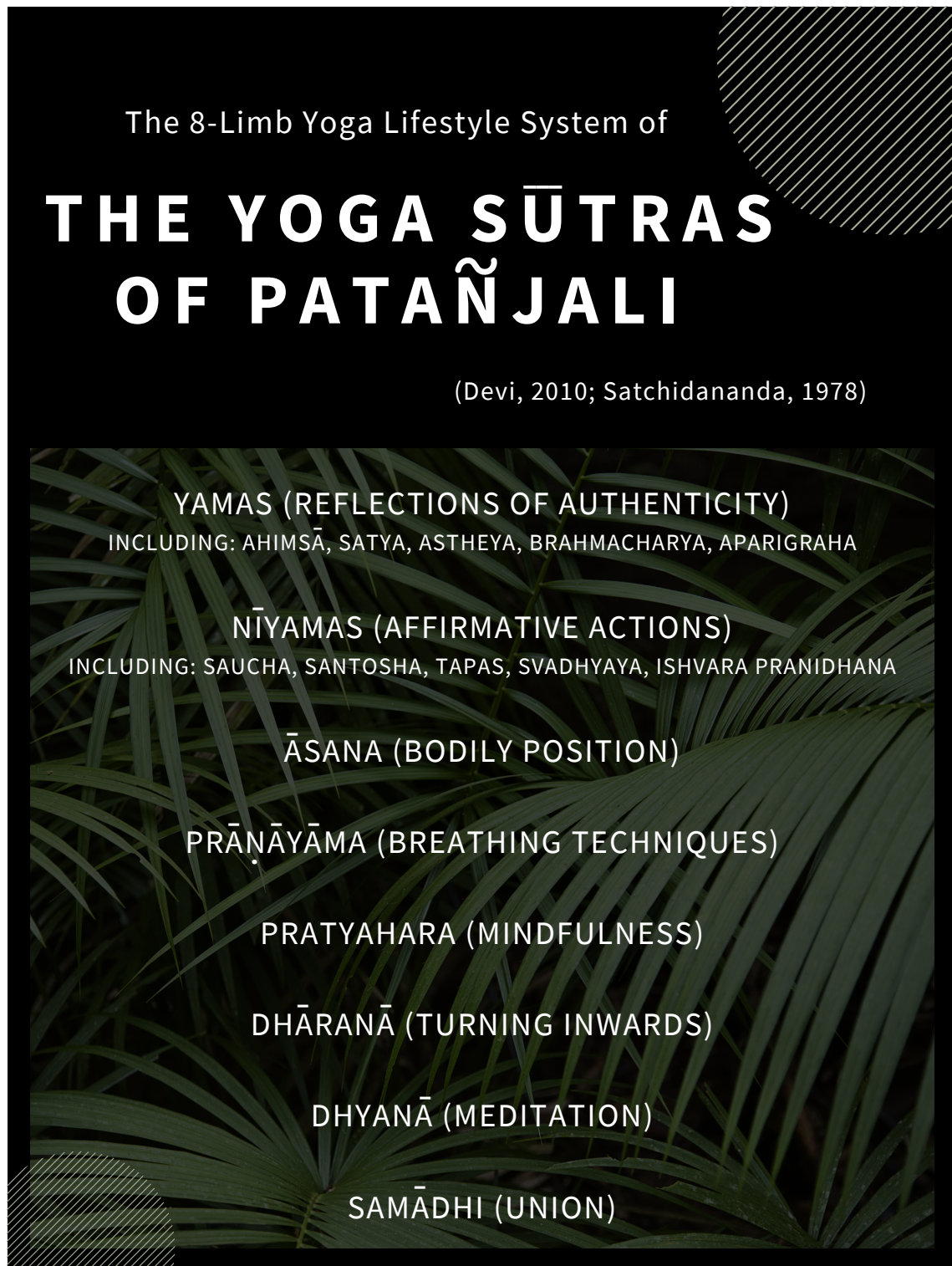
If this poster has caught your attention and you would like to receive further information on this research please contact me via the email address provided below and I can forward you a more detailed layout of the project and what it involves.

Many thanks for your time. I look forward to hearing from you.

**KIND REGARDS, ALLISON JEFFREY**

PhD Candidate, University of Waikato  
adj12@students.waikato.ac.nz

### Appendix 3: Yoga sūtras of Patañjali



## Appendix 4: Research information sheet



### FACULTY OF ARTS & SOCIAL SCIENCES PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

#### **Title of the Project:**

*The Yoga lifestyle as adopted within the contemporary world: An interdisciplinary investigation into the lived experiences of practitioners.*

#### ***Details on the Study***

I am looking to find participants that are willing to be involved in a year long investigation into how today's practitioners are adapting ancient practices within their modern lives. I would like to work with women who are attempting to live a Yoga lifestyle and are over the age of 18.

The words 'Yoga lifestyle' can bring up ideas related to many different practices. Specifically, I am interested in finding a range of individuals that are adopting/adapting a wide variety of Yoga practices. Practices may include (but are not limited to): meditation, āsana, pranayama, ethical observances, consumption practices, rituals, chanting, etc. Please note, you do not have to be an expert in any or all of these practices. If you have been engaging with the Yoga lifestyle for over 5 years, your input is of value to this study.

#### ***Your involvement***

As a participant you will be working alongside a group of committed Yoga practitioners (one of them being the primary researcher) as we flow through a year of involvement and inquiry into the Yoga lifestyle. Although a year sounds like a large commitment, the actual amount of time you devote to this study can be as little as 9 hours (over the course of the entire year). Of course there will be opportunity for you to offer more time,

but this will be entirely in your hands.

Specifically, I will be asking to meet with you three times over the course of the year to have in-depth, one-on-one conversations about the Yoga lifestyle. I anticipate that each of these conversations will last approximately 1 hour. We will meet once at the beginning of the year, once in the middle and once at the end. The meeting in the middle of the year will be less formal and will offer us the chance to catch up over practice and tea.

As a thank you to all Yogis involved in this study, I will be offering complimentary group practice sessions twice over the course of the year. These gatherings will include an hour of Yoga practice followed by snacks and tea. These social times will be optional and will give everyone the opportunity to share their experiences and connect with a community of committed Yoga practitioners.

Lastly, I will be providing each of you with a journal. For 6 months (months 3 – 9), I will ask each practitioner to enter some writing and/or creative pieces related to their Yoga lifestyle. I recommend aiming for approximately 20 entries in total (this works out to be around 1 entry per week). Each person will be encouraged to interact with journals in their preferred style. Journals will be brought to one-on-one meetings where we can go over our journals together and discuss any common themes that are arising. You will only be asked to share parts of your journal that you feel comfortable with discussing and may choose to keep all entries to yourself.

### ***Confidentiality***

As a participant, partial anonymity will be maintained via the use of a pseudonym (fake name). Some minimal identifying information may be referenced (e.g. age, ethnicity, Yoga experience) to aid the research, but all of this will be cleared with you prior to its use in the study. The information collected from this study will be used to write a research report for the fulfillment of my doctoral research and though it will mostly be read by academics, it will be available online and may be accessed by the general public.

### ***Findings***

I expect that this research will offer the opportunity to gain very rich knowledge on the

Yoga lifestyle and it is anticipated that I will be attending conferences and publishing articles. If you would like to be informed of publications or presentations related to this research you will be able to indicate this on the consent form.

### ***Records***

All records from interviews, journals and observations will be kept under the strictest of confidence. They will be archived at least five years according to University of Waikato Human Research Ethics Regulations. All recordings gathered throughout this research will be kept in a secure location for the duration of the research process. No material will be used without your consent.

### ***Co-creation***

I hope that this project will be enriching for both the Yoga practitioners that are participating and the researcher. I will be taking an active part in this project and will be sure to create an environment of co-creation that values your input as much as my own. Every aspect of your contribution will be checked with you prior to its inclusion. Once you receive any transcripts related to your involvement, you will be given 2 weeks to add, change or omit any part of the transcripts. I understand that in this life we are all very busy and sometimes it is not possible to respond to all emails. If I have received no word related to the transcripts and 2 weeks have passed, I will take this as an indication that you are okay with the information you have received and will continue on to analysis.

### ***Freedom to Withdraw***

If you choose to take part in this study you have the right to ask further questions at any point throughout the study. You have the right to refuse to divulge any information and have the ability to add, change and/or omit any information up to 2 weeks after the receipt of any transcripts related to interviews, observations, journal entries and/or group Yoga sessions.

### ***Ethical Disclaimer***

The following research project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences any questions about the ethical conduct of this research may be directed to the Secretary of the Committee. Email:

fass-ethics@waikato.ac.nz. Postal Address: Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences, Te Kura Kete Aronui, University of Waikato, Te Whare Wananga o Waikato, Private Bag 3105, Hamilton, 3240

***Interested?***

If you wish to be involved or require further information please contact myself as the primary researcher at the email address below. If there are any issues related to this research please contact my supervisor via the contact information provided.

Kind regards,

Allison Jeffrey  
Primary Researcher, PhD Candidate  
University of Waikato  
adj12@students.waikato.ac.nz

A.Prof. Karen Barbour  
Chief Supervisor  
University of Waikato  
karen.barbour@waikato.ac.nz



## Appendix 5: Participant consent form



### FACULTY OF ARTS & SOCIAL SCIENCES PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

**Name of Participant:**

---

*Please read each statement and tick the box to indicate acceptance.*

- ☐ I have received a copy of the Information Sheet describing the research project.
  
- ☐ Any questions that I have, relating to the research, have been answered to my satisfaction and I understand that I can ask further questions at any time.
  
- ☐ I understand that my identity will remain confidential (through the use of a pseudonym/fake name) in the presentation of all research findings.
  
- ☐ I allow the researcher to include some identifying information with my pseudonym. This may include age, ethnicity and Yoga experience.
  
- ☐ I understand that I am able to withdraw, add, omit and/or change any information at any point up to 2 weeks after I receive transcripts. If I do not contact the researcher within these 2 weeks, I understand that this indicates my approval of transcripts.
  
- ☐ I understand that I do not have to divulge information unless I am comfortable and can ask to have the recording device turned off at any time.

☐ I understand that I retain ownership of my interviews and journal entries and I give consent for the researcher to use my input from the sources mentioned on the Information Sheet for the sole purpose of the research described.

**Please circle either YES/NO for the following:**

- I wish to receive copies of research findings:                      YES    /    NO
- I wish to receive drafts of conference presentations           YES    /    NO  
and publications:

*Please sign and date to indicate your acceptance of the research terms and involvement in the study.*

Participant:	_____	Researcher:	_____
Signature:	_____	Signature:	_____
Date:	_____	Date:	_____
Email:	_____	Email:	_____
Phone:	_____	Phone:	_____

## Appendix 6: Ethics approval

**Geography Programme**  
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THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**WAIKATO**  
*Te Whare Wānanga o Waiāto*

Allison Jeffrey  
Karen Barbour  
Holly Thorpe

Theatre Studies

17 July 2017

Dear Allison,

**Re: FS2017-28 The Yoga lifestyle as adopted within the modern Western World: An interdisciplinary investigation into the lived experiences of practitioners.**

Thank you for submitting your revised application to the FASS Human Research Ethics Committee. We have reviewed the final electronic version of your application and the Committee is now pleased to offer formal approval for your research activities, including the following:

- semi-structured interviews (conversations) with participants.
- focus groups (group practice sessions) with participants.
- observation of participants.

We would ask that you please provide Eileen Fenner, the FASS Ethics Committee Administrator, with a paper copy of your final application that has been signed by yourself and your supervisors.

We encourage you to contact the committee should issues arise during your data collection, or should you wish to add further research activities or make changes to your project as it unfolds. We wish you all the best with your research. Thank-you for engaging with the process of Ethical Review.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'C. McLeay'.

Colin McLeay, Chair  
*Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee.*

## Appendix 7: Researcher reflections on participants

**Aroha** walks with confidence, humility and warmth. Her wisdom is shared through caring words that facilitate connection. She is involved within her community through a range of avenues helping individuals of various ages that often have minimal or restricted access to affordable Yoga classes. She offers her Yoga for free, or at a low cost, in her community. Connecting her vast knowledge through use of different languages and philosophies she making Yoga spaces that are accessible and welcoming for different cultures and ethnicities.

**Aurora** is strong and capable. Over the ethnographic study she gave birth and offers a depth of insight into lifestyle practices through pregnancy and working a highly stressful demanding job whilst maintaining Yoga principles. Living a fast-paced working life, juggling a large schedule, a family and a personal practice she inspires me to continue reflecting, taking accountability and putting actions into motion.

**Breeze** offered a depth of wisdom gathered over years of engagement. Her bright eyes shining into mine, giving me full presence in our interactions, regularly caused me to pause and take in the beauty of our shared moments. There is an intimacy in her smiling presence. I regularly felt as though she was peering into my soul with her knowing, radiant smile.

**Hamsa** is an extremely experienced practitioner with a wealth of knowledge gathered through her years in various Yoga communities abroad. Her soft voice coupled by her excitement and authenticity found me warming to her and sharing with ease and laughter.

**Kakini** is a woman with a huge heart. She is passionate about the practice of Yoga and follows many of the recommendations found in early Yoga texts. She wakes most mornings for *sadhana* at 4:30 a.m. to fit in her practice around a busy teaching schedule (upwards of eighteen classes per week) and family life with teenagers. She loves fiercely and speaks candidly. Her descriptions of connecting with her family (including

her pets) regularly touched my heart.

**Jyoti** brings fun, candid integrity and deeply profound insight to every interaction. Her very honest reflections on the state of the contemporary commercial Yoga world reflect a wisdom that is beyond her years. This is a hard-working woman with immense empathy who has lived alongside Yoga in varying extremes and continues to craft a dedicated practice built on continual reflection and honesty.

**Maha Shakti** always brings me a lot of joy. Her laugh is contagious and her smile lights up the room. Her excitement when connecting over Yoga and sharing teachings inspired me to try cold showers (admittedly only twice). She regularly filled me with hope. Maha Shakti entered into this research as a new friend and leaves as a woman I greatly admire. She went from being a stranger to a source of inspiration in a very short amount of time.

**Manaia** is a strong Yoga teacher with an infectious personality and passion for life. Her honesty and humour brought many laughs and shared tears to our deeply open interactions. She is continually gathering inspiration from her surroundings in multifaceted ways and our interactions always encouraged me to be brave and continue embodying integrity through all of the ups and downs we experience in this journey of life with Yoga. On the days when our paths cross, I always leave feeling uplifted and inspired.

**Marama** embodies a calm, humble nature. This, coupled with her depth and sincerity, always makes me feel warm, welcomed and inspired. I always feel honoured to share time with Marama as she has a way of moving and expressing that is both refined and soft. After each connection, I took time to reflect on the deep knowledge I was gaining in her presence and, even now, I find myself returning to her knowledge for insight.

**Marina** is both energetic and deeply philosophical. She regularly insists on feeding me with the most amazing foods she effortlessly prepares out of her kitchen that is full of incredible spices. I always find myself laughing in Marina's presence and appreciate her vitality. She mentions regularly that her friends are always amazed by her energy levels, I too am amazed and benefit being in her presence. Her excitement and kindness are

contagious.

**Michael** is a long-standing member of the Waikato Yoga and fitness community. She humbly lives a life of care and considered action. Carefully choosing her words, moving with kindness and generously giving everything she can in each interaction, she is blessing the world that is around her. Michael was the first woman to accept involvement and encourage my research. Her presence and input have been invaluable throughout this process and I am eternally grateful for her involvement and support.

**Nutmeg** is full of energy and humour. Her approach to Yoga brought a buoyancy and light to this research. I loved sharing stories of teaching, practicing and journeying through Yoga with Nutmeg. She is someone who is able to reflect and find both the comedy and the deep learning in every situation. While her approach is light, her understanding is rich and embedded throughout a life of reflection and action.

**Peanut** is an inspiration to everyone that knows her. My first interaction with Peanut was in a Yoga āsana class. I was amazed to observe her graceful movements during an intensive practice. Peanut continues to amaze me. She gives me hope that aging can be a beautiful process of involvement and continual growth. She wrote endless notes in her journal and attributes her wit and physical ability to what her late husband described as ‘cussedness.’ I see her as determined and am grateful that I was given the opportunity to sit and learn from Peanut.

**Sophie** is as intelligent as she is hardworking. She is a woman who thoughtfully moves throughout the world with a balance of love and resilience. I have shared many deep moments with Sophie where she opened my eyes while we talked through extremely in-depth concepts. We share many ‘aha’ moments and her insights reflect a depth of complex critical thinking that greatly benefits both this work and my life.

**Tara** is a dedicated, hardworking woman with multiple jobs. She is extremely reliable, incredibly kind and effortlessly easy going. In one of our chats she described herself as a ‘bit of a rebel.’ I love hearing her insights as she is truly an independent thinker and her honest, grounded perspectives simultaneously lighten and deepen all situations.

**T.** is the youngest of the women in this study and I was endlessly impressed by her thoughtful reflections on extremely complex topics. We regularly run into each other and I always appreciate a big hug and an authentic, warm, interested interaction where we catch up and share about life. I value her depth of knowledge and humility, her activism, her strength and her empathy.

**Robin** is a caring, knowledgeable woman that leads a balanced life of her own design. Through this research, she was balancing two jobs while attending schooling and always managed to find time to meet and share graciously. She is very conscientious and deeply curious. In all of our interactions, she took care in wording her answers to demonstrate her balanced thought processes and did not to assume that her experiences would be everyone's experiences. This empathy and consideration of others is something she exudes in her interactions. She is a joy to be around.

**Uma** has a great giggle. It always makes me smile. She also has an incredibly kind and generous demeanour. Previously a competitive skier, Uma is a woman that is living Yoga, not only as *āsana* on a mat, but as a practice of generosity and warmth consistently offered throughout her interactions in her daily life. I will never forget the day she welcomed me into the house she was building and let me hammer nails on a particularly tough research day. Two women working together in construction was an experience of Yoga that I will always cherish.

**Winifred** is a woman who wears many hats. At times throughout this research she was running three businesses but always managed to find time to accommodate me. She is one of the women I spent the most amount of time with over the course of this study. I have learned an immense amount whilst moving alongside Winifred and am incredibly grateful for her input in this research and presence in my life.

## **Appendix 8: Observation guidelines**

### **Participants will be observed within the following research settings:**

- One-on-one Interviews
- During focus group sessions
- Half-way meetings
- Movement practices
- Informal interactions involving research discussions

### **Observations will document:**

- *Interactions with others*: tone of voice, accentuation of particular words over others, body language, specific words used that may be particular to yogic ‘lingo,’ topics that are discussed, gestures of greeting (hug/kiss/handshake).
- *Non-verbal communication*: body position in various settings (e.g. group / individual / casual / formal), pauses in speech, facial expressions, eye contact.
- *Body positioning and movement patterns*: personal space (e.g. how mats are placed within the Yoga class setting), the style of movement that a practitioner chooses in a given environment (e.g. slow/quick).

### **Reflexive Observations will include:**

- Daily routines and emotional responses during these practices.
- Feelings both in my mind and body as I immerse myself in research/practices.
- Ways that my ideas around my Yoga lifestyle influences my choices throughout my day (consumption/language/relationships/etc).
- Interactions with others (no names of people/places included in writing).
- Any challenges or benefits I am experiencing and reasons behind these tensions/privileges.



## **Appendix 9: Conversation (Interview) schedule**

*\*Initial 5-10mins casual conversation to go over the layout and add any extra questions*

### **Introduction to Yoga:**

- How would you define the term Yoga?
- How long have you been practicing Yoga?
- What initially drew you to these practices?
- Has this changed over the years?
- Why do you continue to practice Yoga?

### **Yoga lifestyle:**

- What comes to mind when I ask you to describe the Yoga lifestyle? (e.g. what elements come to mind / how is a 'Yogi' living their day-to-day life?)
- In thinking about your day-to-day life, can you tell me about ways that you are attempting to live in line with a Yoga lifestyle?
- Where do you gain inspiration for your lifestyle practices?

### **Origins of Yoga lifestyle practices:**

- Can you describe for me a little bit about your understanding of where the teachings of Yoga come from?
- Do you think the original practices of Yoga are influencing Yogis today? How?
- Are elements of the ancient practices available today? (how? where? to what extent?)
- In what ways do you see that the practices of Yoga are shifting to accommodate today's Yogis?

### **Impact of living this lifestyle:**

- Can you describe ways that living the Yoga lifestyle impacts your daily choices?
- What challenges have you faced when attempting to adopt this way of life?
- Have you noticed any beneficial shifts in the way you live your life that may be due to living the Yoga lifestyle?
- Looking back over your experiences with Yoga, what advice would you give to individuals that are interested in living this way?

## Appendix 10: Group practice session (Focus group) schedule

**Required materials:** Music, speaker, research journal, practice space (including mats/blocks/straps), vegan snacks, water and tea, dining ware and mugs/glasses.<sup>27</sup>

**30 minute Yoga class:** The class offered is accessible to all levels and presents variations for all bodily positions. The focus for the class is ‘nurturing connection and community.’

<b>0-5 minutes:</b>	Breathing Exercise (3-part yogic breathing)
<b>5-15 minutes:</b>	Sun Salutation A (variations offered for different levels) with <i>Ganesh maha mantri</i> (see Appendix 11)
<b>15-25 minutes:</b>	Restorative sequence (e.g. supported bridge, gentle inversion with support, happy baby)
<b>25-30 minutes:</b>	Savasana (final resting posture)

**\* Finish and allow time to gather food/tea and return to seat for group discussion.**

### Topics for Discussion from 1<sup>st</sup> round of Interviews:

- What is the Yoga lifestyle?
- Discuss the difference between ancient and contemporary lifestyle practices.
- Which Yoga lifestyle practices do you try to maintain throughout each day.
- What challenges and/or benefits do you experience in adopting this lifestyle?
- What advice would you give to women who are in their first year of attempting to adopt a Yoga lifestyle

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<sup>27</sup> On the page that follows I have included an image of the layout for the group session. Mats and bolsters were placed in a circle with a small offering in the center.



## **Appendix 11: Ganesh maha mantra**

“Om gam ganapataye namaha”

“Broken down, “om” is that traditional meditative primordial sound that means “wake up.” “Gam” is the sound of Ganesha. “Ganapataye” is another word for Ganesha. And “nahama” means “I offer my salutations and bow to you.” So the full translation of om gam ganapataye namaha is more or less, “salutations to the remover of obstacles.”

(Garis, 2019)

## **Appendix 12: Thematic analysis process**

1. After each interview, transcripts and observation notes were combined, quotes of potential significance were highlighted and potential themes were written into a rolling word document. This document was maintained experiencing much variation over the course of the research.
2. After the first round of interviews, themes from the first round of interviews were emailed to the women of this study. The women were given the opportunity to reflect and respond to themes they felt were significant.
3. Themes from this document led discussions in the group practice sessions. After discussions with the women, a number of themes revealed themselves as more prominent than others. The most prominent themes were transferred onto large sheets of paper, colour-coded and placed on my office wall. They broadly included ideas around: lifestyle choices, awareness, union, ethics, knowledges, bodies and embodied practices.
4. After locating broad themes, I once again searched through transcripts from both conversations and group practice sessions as well as my field notes and research journal to locate key words, phrases and quotes related to each theme.
5. As themes gained prominence, I began reflecting on the ways that more concentrated themes could dialogue with feminist literature. This prompted a search throughout feminist literature to find spaces where the most prominent themes arising out of the women's lived experiences in Yoga lifestyles could be articulated with the help of feminist theory.
6. From this point onwards, I continued to collect, write and process through multiple research journals. As I gained new insights from feminist literature, the women's experiences or my own journal writing, I allowed findings to shift.
7. A continual process of getting lost and found amongst empirical material and theory. I responded to findings that inspired an embodied and affective response. When I noticed an embodied response to findings, theories or interactions I recorded a voice memo on my iphone or wrote in my research journal.

## Appendix 13: Marama's sailing metaphor

Below is an email exchange shared with Marama after our first round of recorded conversations. In this example, she offers an eloquent description of the journey of Yoga using the metaphor of sailing:

Hey Marama,

I was just sitting here reflecting on our conversation and I do have one further question...We talked about deepening understanding and feeling union and I can't help but think that this is a difficult process. So many of us live lives that are way out of line with our true nature and it can be quite a difficult process to notice our dis-ease<sup>28</sup> and change our habits to come into a more balanced way. Just wondering...do you see people struggle with this shift in your work and what would you say to people that are experiencing this? What may help them in times when they might want to turn away? I know this is a very tricky question with no one singular answer, but I would love to hear your insights.

Hope you have an incredible day

All the best, Alli<sup>29</sup>

✱

Hi Alli :-)

In response to your great question:

I would use a sailing metaphor.

I believe we all have an inherent plan for our soul's growth. I imagine a lodestar, or guiding star unique to each person that we have set a course for. For some of us, the sails are nicely trimmed and the passage is easy. For others, it may seem like we are 'beating into weather,' we are always battling through our days and it is a challenge to

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<sup>28</sup> I used this spelling (dis-ease) in my email as a reference to unease and Marama responds using the same spelling. I did not edit this spelling for this example.

<sup>29</sup> My full first name is Allison but I more commonly go by the nickname Alli.

stay on course. Or we may feel stuck in the doldrums, going nowhere and waiting for wind. I believe, all conditions offer us the learning we are requiring. However, to stay true to our guiding star and our Soul's purpose, I believe that the 'noticing our dis-ease'/sensing that we are no longer on course, or that our sails need adjusting is the first (huge) step.

Once we 'know' that we are no longer following our guiding star there is always a pervading sense of dis-ease. Harmony can only return once we are back on track. It is not always obvious why we sense this dis-ease or that something is missing, or how to return to feeling at peace again, and this is where it can get tricky and where I see we all sometimes struggle. It is very easy to then start looking outside of ourselves for the answers and 'the way.' This can be helpful in reminding us about all the many, many stars that are out there and can bring a sense of temporary calm. Sometimes we may even come across our own star.

However, it is my sense that our very own guiding star resides within us and it is only in going within that we can truly reconnect with our Selves and our own unique course. I believe it is important not to assume we know the way without first regularly coming Home (going within) to check in with our internal compass, to remain open to our sometimes ever-changing needs and desires, to constantly trim our sails, to change them if need be, and in this way to follow our guiding star and stay true to our soul's purpose. In my experience, Yoga and Meditation offer me this clear path Home/within. It is through this slowing down, this reconnect with breath, with body that I am able to sense within myself a deeply still and peaceful expanse (much like the night sky), where my own guiding star shines bright.

For anyone who has lost their way a little or a lot, I would gently suggest the first step is in finding their way Home.

I hope this is helpful and makes some sense.

Hope you have sunshine where you are today.

Marama

## **Appendix 14: Entangled feminist and yogic concepts in ethnographic research**

Below, as inspired by Madison's (2020) list of qualities present in mindful ethnographic research, I present key entangled concepts that were of relevance in this feminist-yogic ethnography. They include: *samādhi* (union) and entanglement, *satya* (authenticity) and integrity, *santosa* (active acceptance) and generative becomings, *āsana* (bodily position) and embodiment, *svadhyaya* (increasing awareness) and multi-method reflexivity, *ahimsā* (kindness) and affirmative ethics. As mentioned in this thesis, these are a selection of values that I found most relevant in this study. Future feminist entangled ethnographies on Yoga could find more relevance in other teachings. This structure is not intended to be static, but to encourage inquiry around entangled knowledges in research settings.

### ***Samādhi* (union) and Entanglement**

The connection between these two concepts was described in Chapters Three and Five. There were many opportunities to find union in this work. The concept of entanglement influenced a consideration of knowledges (feminist and yogic) as well as an ontological inquiry into how bodies can be represented as entangled with materiality. Beyond this, considering both *samādhi* and entanglement encouraged increased ethical behaviours of kindness and empathy. Embodying this ontological understanding of connection influenced the overarching philosophy I was embodying in this research.

### ***Satya* (authenticity) and Integrity**

This entanglement is inspired by findings discussed in Chapter Four. In my own research process, I found that the quality of vulnerability continually enabled me to face complexity and open towards honesty and truthfulness in each research situation. Bringing these qualities into a dialogue with the ways that the women were understanding authenticity, this entanglement found increasing relevance in a feminist ethnography on Yoga. The qualities of honesty, vulnerability, authenticity and integrity,



although subtly different, were similarly influencing my ability to connect with the women and form deep, trusting relationships. This demanded continual effort and attention.

### ***Santosha* (active acceptance) and Generative becomings**

Braidotti's (2019) writing on generative life and Breeze's description (in Chapter Six) of acceptance as an acknowledgement of life as it is arising both inspired this entanglement. As an active acceptance and a generative becoming, this entanglement references both agency and motion. In allowing my understandings to be led by the women and expand over time, I found a cumulative learning that required my active participation and a willingness to allow the research to evolve as it wanted to, not as I intended. I had to accept that certain themes were arising as more prominent than those I had originally anticipated. Accepting this research and the women exactly as they arrived allowed me to dive deeply into empirical material without trying to make it something else.

### ***Āsana* (bodily position) and Embodiment**

Both *āsana* (bodily position) and embodiment (Barbour, 2018b) were incredibly important concepts that influenced many components of this research. An embodied project on Yoga lifestyles is prioritising the body as the material through which all experiences are arising. My body, the bodies of the women and the material entities in our daily lives were contributing to a knowing that is at the same time physical, emotional, social, cultural and environmental (Barbour, 2004). In this feminist Yoga lifestyle ethnography, the body was considered as an entangled phenomena and a valuable source of learning that contributed to a breadth of understanding that is inaccessible through standard ethnographic methodology.

### ***Svadhyaya* (increasing awareness) and Multi-method reflexivity**

Moving with women, deeply inquiring into personal experiences and questioning the nature of existence produced an increased awareness. The women's interpretation of *svadhyaya* extended beyond solely self-awareness and included a more broadly defined

understanding of increasing awareness through present moment attentiveness. In relation to reflexivity, contemplating awareness that extends beyond the self encouraged me to engage in a wider range of reflexive practices (see Appendix 15).

### ***Ahimsā* (kindness) and Affirmative ethics**

Expressing kindness, care and prioritising the affirmative in this research setting facilitated a project that was inspiring for the women and myself as a researcher. Conceptualising *ahimsā* as an affirmative practice influenced all decision making and ultimately enabled this study to bring many shared moments of appreciation between myself and the practitioners. By focusing on the affirmative, this research found creative ways to think through challenging situations and search for hopeful answers. Reframing wording (as often as possible) toward affirmative potentials assisted my process throughout the entirety of this research.

## Appendix 15: Multi-method reflexivity

Below, I describe the various ways that I immersed myself in multi-faceted methods for addressing reflexivity in this research on Yoga lifestyles. The methods presented feature many Yoga-inspired elements and this is particular to this research and my own interests. In future research, and in different cultural and movement settings, the range of practices may differ in relation to the researcher's sensibilities and the context of the study. I place techniques in sections to help differentiate between frequencies.

**Daily:** Reflexive journaling, mindful walking (listening to calm music and walking around campus taking moments to stop and experience my senses), meditation, breathing exercises, movement practices (anywhere from 20 minutes to 2 hours and in the privacy of my home), other gym based activities (primarily high intensity workouts).

**Weekly:** Yoga classes at least 3 times per week (other than those I was teaching), Movement for Wellbeing classes on campus (when available) (Barbour, Clark & Jeffrey, 2019), boxing, dance, running, Friday afternoons spent playing the piano, attending weekly (and free) concerts at the University, spending time weeding or planting in the garden.

**Monthly:** I would drive to a city nearby and take a number of Yoga classes on a Saturday or Sunday to experience different studios and teachers, longer hikes with friends or solo excursions in nature (often to waterfalls or hot pools), therapeutic sessions (these sessions took many forms including: counselling, Reiki, singing bowl healing, float tank therapies, Thai massage). I tried to include one session per month of something that could nourish me throughout this experience.

**Singular events (one day and/or multi-day):** A Yoga teacher training in Auckland (5 days), one multi-day workshop with a respected Yoga teacher (Donna Farhi), a silent meditation retreat, five multi-day Yoga festivals (Love Lake Festival, 2 x New Zealand's International Yoga Festival, 2 x Wanderlust), participating in a community-led class of 108 sun salutations, 3 x two-hour ecstatic dance afternoons, a 'sound journey' meditation event.